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REVENGE.

A Novel.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE FATE," "THE WOODMAN," "HENRY SMEATON,"
"THE FORGERY," "THE OLD OAK CHEST," ETC., ETC.

"Vain, witless woman! why should I desire
To add more heat to thy immortal fire?
To urge thee, by the violence of hate,
To shake the pillars of thine own estate,
When whatsoever we intend to do,
Our worst misfortune ever sorteth to;
And nothing else remains for us beside,
But only tears and coffins to provide!"

DRAYTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

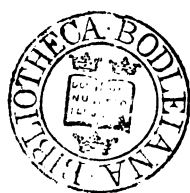
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R E V E N G E .

CHAPTER I.

It was long ere Emily Hastings slept. There was a bright moonlight ; but she sat not by the window looking out at the moon in love-lorn guise. No ; she laid her down in bed, as soon as the toilet of the night was concluded ; and, having left the window-shutter open, the gleam of the sweet, calm brightener of the night poured in a long, tranquil ray across the

floor. She watched it with her head resting on her hand for a long time. Her fancy was very busy with it, as, by slow degrees, it moved its place, now lying like a silver carpet by her bed-side, now crossing the floor far away, and painting the opposite wall. Her thoughts then wandered to other subjects; and, whether she would or not, Marlow took a share in them. She remembered things that he had said—his looks came back to her mind—she seemed to converse with him again, running over in thought all that had passed in the morning.

She was no castle-builder : no schemes, plans, designs, were in her mind : no airy structures of future happiness employed fancy as their architect. She was happy in her own heart ; and imagination, like a bee, extracted honey from the flowers of the present.

Sweet Emily ! how beautiful she looked, as she lay there, and made a night-life for herself in the world of her own thoughts.

She could not sleep, she knew not why : indeed, she did not wish, or try to sleep. She never sought it when sleep did not come naturally ; but always remained calmly waiting for the soother, till slumber dropped uncalled and stilly, like snow-flakes, on her eyelids.

An hour—two hours—had passed: the moon-beam had retired far into a corner of the room—the household was all still. No sound was heard but the barking of a distant farm-dog, such a long way off that it reached the ear more like an echo than a sound, and the crowing of a cock, not much more near.

Suddenly her door opened, and a figure entered, bearing a small night-lamp. Emily started and gazed. She was not much given to fear, and she uttered not a sound; for which command over herself she was very thankful, when, in the tall, graceful form before her, she recognized Mrs. Hazleton, who was dressed merely as she had risen from her bed, her rich black hair

bound up under her snowy cap, her long night-gown trailing on the ground, and her feet bare. Yet she looked, perhaps, more beautiful than in jewels and ermine. Her eyes were not fixed and motionless, though there was a certain sort of dimness in them ; neither were her movements stiff and mechanical, as we often see in the representations of somnambulism on the stage. On the contrary, they were free and graceful. She looked neither like Malibran, nor any other who ever *acted* what she really *was*. Those who have seen the state know better. She was walking in her sleep, however—that strange act of a life apart from waking ; that mystery of mysteries, when the soul seems severed from all things of earth but the body which it inhabits ; when the mind sleeps, but the spirit wakes ; when the animal and the spiritual live together, yet the intellectual lies dead for the time.

Emily comprehended her condition at once, and waited and watched, having

heard that it is dangerous to wake suddenly a person in such a state. Mrs. Hazleton walked on past her bed towards a door at the other side of the room ; but stopped opposite the toilet-table, took up a ribbon that was lying on it, and held it in her hand for a moment.

"I hate him," she said aloud; "but strangle him—Oh, no! That would not do : it would leave a blue mark. I hate him and her too. They can't help it—they must fall into the trap."

Emily rose quietly from her bed, and, advancing with a soft step, took Mrs. Hazleton's hand gently. She made no resistance, only gazing at her with a look not utterly devoid of meaning.

"A strange world," she ejaculated, "where people must live with those they hate!"

She then suffered Emily to lead her towards the door; but showed some reluctance to pass it, and turned slowly towards the other door. Her beautiful young guide led her thither, and opened it ; then went

oa through the neighbouring room, which was vacant, Mrs. Hazleton exclaiming, as they passed the large bed canopied with velvet.

“My mother died there—ah me!”

The next door opened into the corridor ; but Emily knew not where her hostess slept, till perceiving a light streaming out upon the floor from a room near the end, she guided Mrs. Hazleton’s steps thither, rightly judging that it must be the chamber she had just left. Then she quietly induced her to go to bed again, taking the lamp from her hand ; and, bending down her sweet innocent face, gave her a gentle kiss.

“Asp!” ejaculated Mrs. Hazleton, turning away. But Emily remained with her several minutes, till the eyes closed, the breathing became calm and regular, and natural sleep succeeded to the strange state into which she had fallen.

Returning to her own room, Emily once more sought her bed ; but though

the moonlight had now departed, she was farther from sleep than ever.

Mrs. Hazleton's words still rung in her ears. She thought them very strange; but she had heard—it was, indeed, a common superstition in those days—that people talking in their sleep expressed feelings exactly the reverse of those which they really entertained; and her good, bright heart was glad to believe. She would not, for the world, have thought that the fair form and gentle, dignified manners of her friend, would show feelings so fierce and vindictive as those which had breathed forth in the utterance of that one word, "Hate." It seemed to her impossible that Mrs. Hazleton could hate any thing; and she resolved to believe so still. Yet the words rung in her ears, as I have said; she had been somewhat agitated and alarmed, too, though less than many might have been; and more than an hour passed ere her eyes closed.

On the morning of the following day,

Emily was rather late at breakfast ; she found Mrs. Hazleton down, and looking bright and beautiful as the morning. It was evident that she had not even the faintest recollection of what had occurred in the night : that it was a portion of her life apart, between which and waking existence no communication was open. Emily determined to take no notice of her sleep-walking, and she was wise ; for I have always found that, to be informed of their strange peculiarity, leaves an awful and painful impression on real somnambulists—a feeling of being unlike the rest of human beings—of having a sort of preternatural existence over which their human reason can hold no control. They fear themselves—they fear their own acts—perhaps their own words, when the power is gone from that familiar mind which is more or less the servant, if not the slave, of will, and when the whole mixed being, flesh and mind and spirit, is under the sole governance of that darkest,

least known, most mysterious personage of the three—the soul.

Mrs. Hazleton scolded her jestingly for late rising, and asked if she were always such a lie-a-bed. Emily replied that she was not so, but usually very matutinal in her habits.

“The truth is, dear Mrs. Hazleton,” she added, “I did not sleep well last night.”

“Indeed !” said her fair hostess, with a gay smile. “Who were you thinking of, Emily, to keep your young eyes open ?”

“Of you,” answered Emily, simply.

And Mrs. Hazleton asked no more questions ; for perhaps she did not wish Emily to think of her too much.

Immediately after breakfast, the carriage was ordered for a long drive.

“I will give you, Emily, so large a dose of mountain air,” said Mrs. Hazleton, “that it shall ensure you a better night’s rest than any narcotic could procure. We

will go and see Ellendun Castle, far in the wilds, some sixteen miles hence."

Emily was well pleased with the proposal; and they set out together, both apparently equally prepared to enjoy everything they met with. The drive was a long one in point of time; for not only were the carriages more cumbrous and heavy in those days, but the road continued ascending nearly the whole way. Sometimes, indeed, a short run down into a gentle valley relieved the horses from the continued tug upon the collar; but it was very brief, and the ascent recommenced almost immediately. Beautiful views over the surrounding scenery presented themselves at every turn; and Emily, who had all the spirit of a painter in her heart, looked forth from the window enchanted.

Mrs. Hazleton marked her enjoyment with great satisfaction; for, either by study or intuition, she had a deep knowledge of the springs and sources of human emotions,

and she knew well that one enthusiasm always disposes to another. Nay, more, she knew that whatever is associated in the mind with pleasant scenes is usually pleasing ; and she had plotted the meeting between Emily and him she intended to be her lover with considerable pains to produce that effect. Nature seemed to have been a sharer in her schemes. The day could not have been better chosen : the light, fresh air, the few floating clouds, the merry, dancing gleams upon hill and dale, a momentary shower of large jewel-like drops, the fragment of a broken rainbow painting the distant verge of heaven—such were the “skyy influences.”

At length the summit of the hills was reached ; and Mrs. Hazleton told her companion to look out there, ordering the carriage, at the same time, to stop. It was, indeed, a scene well worthy of the gaze. Far spreading beneath the eye, lay a wide basin in the hills, walled in, as it were, by their

tall summits, here and there broken by a crag. The ground sloped gently down from the spot at which the carriage paused, so that the whole expanse was open to the eye ; and over the short, brown herbage, through which a purple gleam from the yet unblossomed heath shone out, the light and shade seemed sporting in mad glee. All was, indeed, solitary, uncultivated, and even bare ; except where, in the very centre of the wide hollow, appeared a number of trees—not grouped together in a wood, but scattered over a considerable space of ground, as if they were remnants of some old deer-park ; and over their tall tops rose up the ruined keep of some ancient stronghold of races passed away, with here and there another tower or pinnacle, and long lines of grassy mounds, greener than the rest of the landscape, glancing between the stems of the older trees, or bearing up in picturesque confusion their own growth of wild, fantastic, seedling ashes.

By the name of the spot, Ellendun, which, I believe, means strong-hill, it is more than probable that the Anglo-Saxons had here some fort before the Conquest ; but the ruin which now presented itself to the eyes of Emily and Mrs. Hazleton was evidently of later date, and of Norman construction.

Here probably some proud baron of the time of Henry, Stephen, or Matilda, had built his nest on high, perchance to overawe the Saxon churls around him, perhaps to set at defiance the royal power itself. Here the merry chase had swept the hills : here revelry and pageantry had chequered a life of fierce strife and haughty oppression. Such scenes—at least such thoughts—presented themselves to the imaginative mind of Emily, like the dreamy gleams that skimmed in gold and purple before her eyes ; but the effect of any strong feeling, whether of enjoyment or of grief, was always to make her silent ; and she gazed without uttering a word.

Mrs. Hazleton, however, understood some points in her character ; and, by the long fixed look, from beneath the dark, sweeping lashes of her eyes—by the faint, sweet smile, that gently curled her lip—and by the sort of gasping sigh after she had gazed breathlessly for some moments, she knew how intense was that gentle creature's delight in a scene which, to many an eye, would have offered no peculiar charm.

She would not suffer it to lose any of its first effect ; and, after a brief pause, ordered the carriage to drive on. Still Emily continued to look onward out of the carriage window ; and, as the road turned in the descent, the Castle and the ancient trees grouped themselves differently every minute. At length, as they came nearer, she said, turning to Mrs. Hazleton,

“ A man seems to be standing at the very highest point of the old keep.”

“ He must be bold indeed,” replied her

companion, looking out also. "When you come close to it, dear Emily, you will see that it requires the foot of a goat and the heart of a lion to climb up there over the rough, disjointed, tottering stones. Good Heaven! I hope he will not fall!"

Emily closed her eyes.

"It is very foolish," she said.

"Ah! men have pleasure in such feats of daring," answered Mrs. Hazleton, "which we women cannot understand. He is coming down again as steadily as if he were treading a ball room. I wish that tree were out of the way."

In two or three minutes, the carriage passed between two rows of old and somewhat decayed oaks, and stopped between the fine gates of the Castle, (covered with ivy, and rugged with Time's too artistic hand) and a building which, if it did not detract from the picturesque beauty of the scene, certainly deprived it of all romance. There, just opposite the entrance, stood a

small house, built, apparently, of stone abstracted from the ruins, and bearing on a pole, projecting from the front, a large, blue sign-board, on which was rudely painted, in yellow, the figure of what we now call a French horn, while underneath appeared an inscription to the following effect :—

“JOHN BUTTERCROSS, at the Sign of the Bugle Horn, sells wine and aqua vitæ, and good lodging for man and horse. N.B.—Donkeys to be found within.”

Emily laughed, and in an instant came down to common earth.

Mrs. Hazleton wished both John Buttercross and his sign in one fire or another, though she could not help owning that such a house in so remote a place might be a great convenience to visitors like herself. She took the matter quietly, however, returning Emily's gay look with one somewhat rueful, and saying,

“Ah, dear girl, all very mundane and

unromantic ; but depend upon it this house has proved a blessing often to poor wanderers in bleak weather over these wild hills ; and we ourselves may find it not so unpleasant by-and-bye, when Paul has spread our luncheon in the parlour, and we look out of a little casement at the old ruin there."

Thus saying, she alighted from the carriage, gave some orders to her servants and to an hostler who was leading up and down a remarkably beautiful horse which seemed to have been ridden hard ; and then, leaning on Emily's arm, walked up the slope towards the gate.

Barbican and outer wall were gone—fallen long ago into the ditch, and covered with the all-receiving earth and a green coat of turf. You could tell where they lay, only by the undulations of the ground and the grassy hillocks here and there. The great gate still stood firm, however, with its two tall towers standing like giant war-

ders to guard the entrance. There were the ancient parapets, the long loopholes mantled with ivy, the outslipping basement, against which the battering ram might have played in vain, the family escutcheon with the arms crumbled from it, and the portcullis itself, showing its iron teeth above the traveller's head.

It was the most perfect part of the building ; and when the two ladies entered the great court, the scene of ruin was more complete. Many a tower had fallen, leaving large gaps in the inner wall ; the chapel, with only one beautiful window left, and the fragments of two others, lay mouldering on the right ; and, at some distance in front, appeared the tall, massive keep, the lower rooms of which were in tolerable preservation, though the roof had fallen in to the second story, and the airy summit had lost its symmetry by the destruction of two entire sides. Short green turf covered the whole court, except where some

heaps of stone, more recently fallen than others, still stood out bare and grey ; but a crop of brambles and nettles bristled up near the chapel, and here and there a tree had planted itself upon the tottering ruins of the walls.

Mrs. Hazleton walked straight towards the entrance of the keep, along a little path, sufficiently well worn to shew that the Castle had frequent visitors ; and was within a few steps of the door-way, when a figure issued forth, which, to say sooth, did not at all surprise her to behold. She gave a little start, however, saying, in a low tone, to Emily,

“ That must be our climbing friend whose neck we thought in peril a short time since.”

The gentleman—for such estate was indicated by his dress, which was dark and sober, but well made and costly—took a step or two slowly forward, verging a little to the side, as if to let two ladies pass

whom he did not know ; but suddenly he stopped, gazed for an instant with a dull, assumed look of surprise and enquiry, and then hurried rapidly towards them, raising his hat not ungracefully, while Mrs. Hazleton exclaimed,

“ Oh ! how fortunate ! Here is a friend who, doubtless, can tell us all about the ruins.”

At the same moment Emily recognised the young man whom she had found accidentally wounded in her father's park.

CHAPTER II.

“LET me introduce Mr. Ayliffe to you, Emily,” said Mrs. Hazleton. “But you seem to know each other already. Is it so?”

“I have seen this gentleman before,” returned her young companion, “but did not know his name. I hope you have quite recovered from your wound.”

“Quite, I thank you, Miss Hastings,” replied John Ayliffe, in a quiet and respectful tone; “but then,” he added, “the

interest you kindly shewed on the occasion, I believe did much to cure me."

"Too much, and too soon!" thought Mrs. Hazleton, as she remarked a slight flush pass over Emily's cheek to which her reply gave interpretation.

"Every one, I suppose, would feel the same interest," answered the beautiful girl, "in suffering such as you seemed to endure when I accidentally met you in the park.—Shall we go on into the Castle?"

The last words were addressed to Mrs. Hazleton, who immediately assented, but asked Mr. Ayliffe to act as their guide; and, at the very first opportunity, whispered to him, "Not too quick."

He seemed to comprehend in a moment what she meant; and, during the rest of the ramble round the ruins, behaved himself with a good deal of discretion. His conversation could not be said to be agreeable to Emily, for there was little in it either to amuse or interest. His stores of information were very limited—at least,

upon subjects with which she herself was conversant ; and although he endeavoured to give it every now and then a poetical turn, the attempt was not very successful. On the whole, however, he did tolerably well till after the luncheon at the inn, to which Mrs. Hazleton invited him, when he began to entertain his two fair companions with an account of a rat-hunt, which surprised Emily not a little, and drew almost instantly from Mrs. Hazleton a monitory gesture.

The young man looked confused, and broke off suddenly with an embarrassed laugh, saying, "Oh, I forgot. Such exploits are not very fit for ladies' ears ; and to say the truth, I do not like them myself when there is anything better to do."

"I should think that something better might always be found," replied Mrs. Hazleton gravely, taking to her own lips the reproof which she knew was in Emily's heart ; "but, I dare say, you were a boy when this happened ?"

"Oh, quite a boy," he said, "quite a boy. I have other things to think of now."

But the impression was made, and—it was not favourable. With keen acuteness, Mrs. Hazleton watched every look of her young friend, and every turn of the conversation ; and, seeing that the course of things had begun ill for her purposes, she very soon proposed to order the carriage and return, resolving to take, as it were, a fresh start on the following day. She did not then ask young Ayliffe to dine at her house, as she had at first intended ; but was well pleased, notwithstanding, to see him mount his horse, in order to accompany them on the way back—for she had remarked that his horsemanship was excellent, and well knew that skill in manly exercises is always a strong recommendation in a woman's eyes. Nor was this all :—decidedly handsome in person, John Ayliffe had nevertheless a certain common—not exactly vulgar—air, when on his feet,

which was lost as soon as he was in the saddle. There—with a perfect seat, and upright, dashing carriage, managing a fierce, wild horse, with complete mastery—he appeared to the greatest advantage.

But all his horsemanship was thrown away upon Emily. Had she been asked by any one, she would have admitted at once that he was a very handsome man, and a good and graceful rider ; but she never asked herself whether he was so or not ; and, indeed, did not think about it at all.

One thing, however, she did think ; and that was—not what Mrs. Hazleton desired. She thought him a coarse and vulgar-minded young man ; and she wondered how a woman of such refinement as Mrs. Hazleton could be pleased with his society. At the end of that day, only one impression remained in his favour, which was produced by an undefinable resemblance to her father—evanescent but ever returning. No one feature was like : the colouring was different ;—the hair, eyes, beard,

—all dissimilar. He was much handsomer than Sir Philip Hastings ever had been ; but now and then came a glance of the eye, or a curl of the lip,—a family expression which was familiar and pleasant to her.

John Ayliffe accompanied the carriage to the gates of Mrs. Hazleton's park, and there the lady beckoned him up, and, in a kind, half-jesting tone, bade him keep himself disengaged the next day, as she might want him.

He promised to obey, and rode off ; but Mrs. Hazleton never mentioned his name again during the evening, which passed over in quiet conversation, with little reference to the events of the morning.

Before she went to bed, however, Mrs. Hazleton wrote a somewhat long epistle to John Ayliffe, full of very important hints for his conduct next day, and ending with an injunction to burn the letter as soon as he had read it. This being done, she re-

tired to rest ; and that night—what with free mountain air and exercise—she and Emily both slept soundly. The next morning, however, she felt—or affected to feel—fatigue, and put off another expedition which had been proposed.

Noon had hardly arrived, when Mr. Ayliffe presented himself, to receive her commands ; and there he remained, being invited to stay to dinner—not much to Emily's satisfaction. For some time, Mrs. Hazleton seemed determined to keep all his conversation to herself ; but at length she remembered that she had letters to write, and, seated at a table in the window, went on covering sheets of paper with a rapid hand, for more than an hour, while John Ayliffe seated himself by Emily's embroidery-frame, and laboured to efface the bad impression of the day before by a very different strain of conversation. He spoke of many things more suited to her tastes and habits than those which he had previously noticed, and spoke not altogether

amiss. But there was something forced in it all: it was as if he were reading sentences out of a book ;—and, in truth, it is probable he was repeating a lesson.

Emily did not know what to do. She would have given the world to be freed from his society ; to go out and enjoy her own thoughts amongst woods and flowers ; or even to sit quietly in her own room, feeling the summer air and looking at the glorious sky. To seek that refuge, however, she thought would be rude ; and to go out to walk in the park would, she doubted not, induce him to follow. She sat still, therefore, with marvellous patience, answering briefly when an answer was required ; but never speaking in reply with any of that free pouring-forth of heart and mind which can only take place where sympathy is strong.

She was rewarded for her endurance ; for when it had lasted well nigh as long as she could bear it, the drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Marlow appeared. His eyes were

instantly fixed upon Emily with that young man sitting by her side ; and a feeling strange and painful came upon him. But the next instant, the bright, glad, natural, unchecked look of satisfaction with which she rose to greet him, swept every doubt-making jealousy away.

Very different was the look of Mrs. Hazleton. The same black shadow, which I have mentioned once before, came across her brow ; the same lightning flashed from her eye. But both passed away in a moment ; and the feelings which produced them were again hidden in her heart. They were bitter enough ; for she had read, with the clear eye-sight of jealousy, all that Marlow's look of surprise and annoyance—all that Emily's look of joy and relief—betrayed.

They might not yet call themselves lovers—they might not even be conscious that they were so ; but that they were and would be, from that moment, Mrs. Hazle-

ton had no doubt. The conviction had come upon her, not exactly gradually, but by fits as it were--first a doubt, and then a fear, and then a certainty that one, and then that both, loved.

If it were so, she knew that her present plans must fail; yet she pursued them with an eagerness very different than before—a wild, rash, almost frantic eagerness. There was a chance, she thought, of driving Emily into the arms of John Ayliffe, with no love for him, and love for another; and there was a bitter sort of satisfaction in the very idea. Fears for her father, she almost hoped, might operate where no other inducement could have power; and such means she resolved to bring into play at once, without waiting for the dull, long process of drilling Ayliffe into gentlemanly carriage, or winning for him some way in Emily's regard. To force her to marry him, hating rather than loving him, would be a mighty gratification; and for it Mrs.

Hazleton resolved at once to strike. But she knew that hypocrisy was needed more than ever; and therefore it was that the brow was smoothed, and the eye calmed in a moment.

To Marlow, during his visit, she was courteous and civil enough, but still so far cold as to give him no encouragement to stay long. She kept a watch, too, upon all that passed, not only as regarded him and Emily, but him and John Ayliffe; for a quarrel between them, which she thought likely, was not what she desired. There was, however, no danger of such a result. Marlow treated the young man, whom he seemed to comprehend in a moment, with a cold and distant politeness—a proud civility, which left him no pretext for offence, and yet silenced and abashed him completely. During the whole visit, till towards its close, the contrast between the two men was so marked and strong, so disadvantageous to him whom Mrs. Hazleton sought to favour, that

she would have given much to have Ayliffe away from such a damaging comparison. At length she could endure it no longer, and contrived to send him to seek for some flowers that she pretended to want, and which she knew he would not readily find in her garden.

Before he returned, Marlow was gone ; and Emily soon after retired to her own room, leaving Ayliffe and Mrs. Hazleton together.

The three met again at dinner, and, for once, a subject was brought up by accident or design—which I know not—that gave John Ayliffe an opportunity of setting himself in a somewhat better light. Every one has some amenity—some sweet and gentle spot in the character. John had a great love for flowers, a passion for them ; and it brought forth the small, very small, portion of the poetry of the heart which had been assigned to him by Nature. It was flowers, then, that Mrs. Hazleton talked

of; and he soon joined in discussing their beauties, with a thorough knowledge of, and feeling for, his subject. Emily was surprised, and with natural kindness felt glad to find some topic where she could converse with him at ease. The change of her manner encouraged him; and he went on for once wisely, keeping to a subject on which he was at home, and which seemed so well to please. Mrs. Hazleton helped him greatly, with a skill and rapidity which few could have displayed, always guiding the conversation back to the well-chosen theme, whenever it was lost for an instant.

At length, when the impression was the most favourable, John Ayliffe rose to go. I know not whether he did so at a sign from Mrs. Hazleton, but I think he did. Few men quit a room gracefully—it is a difficult evolution—and he certainly did not. But Emily's eyes were in a different direction; and, to say the truth, although he

had seemed to her more agreeable that evening than he had been before, she thought too little of him to remark how he quitted the room, even if her eyes had been upon him.

From time to time, indeed, some of the strange, vague words which he had used when she had seen him in the park, recurred to her mind with an unpleasant impression, and she puzzled herself with the question of what could be their meaning ; but she soon dismissed the subject, resolving to seek some information from Mrs. Hazleton, who seemed to know the young man well.

On the preceding night, that lady had avoided all mention of him ; but that was not the case now. She spoke of him almost as soon as he was gone, in a tone of some compassion, alluding eagerly and mysteriously to misfortunes and disadvantages under which he had laboured, and saying that it was marvellous to see

how strength of mind and natural high qualities could resist adverse circumstances.

This called forth from Emily the enquiry which she had meditated; and, although she could not recollect exactly the words John Ayliffe had used, she detailed with sufficient accuracy all that had taken place between herself and him, and the strange allusion he had made towards Sir Philip Hastings.

Mrs. Hazleton gazed at her for a moment or two after she had done speaking, with a look expressive of anxious concern.

"I trust, my dear Emily," she said, at length, "that you did not repel him at all harshly. I have had much sad experience of the world; and I know that in youth we are too apt to touch hardly and rashly things that, for our own best interests, as well as for good feeling's sake, we ought to deal with tenderly."

"I do not think I spoke harshly," re-

plied Emily, thoughtfully. "I told him that anything he had to say must be said to my father ; but I do not believe I spoke that unkindly."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad," returned Mrs. Hazleton, with much emphasis. Then, after a short pause, she added—
"Yet I do not know that your father—excellent, noble-minded, just, and generous as he is—was the person best fitted to judge and act in the matter which John Ayliffe might have to speak of."

"Indeed !" exclaimed Emily, becoming more and more surprised, and in some degree alarmed, "This is very strange, dear Mrs. Hazleton. You seem to know more of this matter ; pray explain it all to me. I may well hear from you what would be improper for me to listen to from him."

"He has a kindly heart," said Mrs. Hazleton, thoughtfully, "and more forbearance than I ever knew in one so young ;

but it cannot last for ever ; and when he is of age, which will be in a very few days, he must act, and, I trust, will act kindly and gently. I am sure he will, if nothing occurs to irritate a bold and decided character."

"But act how?" inquired Emily, eagerly. "You forget, dear Mrs. Hazleton, that I am quite in the dark in this matter. I dare affirm he is all that you say ; but I will own that neither his manners generally, nor his demeanor on that occasion, led me to think very well of him, or to believe that he was of a forbearing or gentle nature."

"He has faults," said Mrs. Hazleton, drily. "Oh, yes, he has faults ; but they are those of manner more than heart or character,—faults produced by circumstances—which may be changed by circumstances--and which would never have existed, had he had earlier one judicious, kind, and ex-

perienced friend to counsel and direct him. They are disappearing rapidly; and if ever he should fall under the influence of a generous and noble spirit, will vanish altogether."

She was preparing the way skillfully, exciting, as she saw, some interest in Emily, and yet producing some alarm.

"But still, you do not explain," said the beautiful girl, anxiously. "Do not, dear Mrs. Hazleton, keep me longer in suspense."

"I cannot—I ought not, Emily—to explain all to you," replied the lady: "it would be a long and painful story; but this I may tell you, and after that ask me no more. That young man has your father's fortunes and his fate entirely in his hands. He has forborne long. Heaven grant that his forbearance may still endure."

She ceased; and, after one glance at

Emily's face, to see the impression she had made, cast down her eyes, and seemed to fall into thought.

Emily gazed up towards the sky, as if seeking counsel there. Then, bursting into tears, she hurriedly quitted the room.

CHAPTER III.

EMILY'S night was not peaceful. The very idea that her father's fate was in the power of any other man, was, in itself, trouble enough ; but in the present case there was more. Why or wherefore, she knew not ; but something told her that, in spite of all Mrs. Hazleton's commendations, and the fair portrait she had so elaborately drawn, John Ayliffe was not a man to use power mercifully. She tried eagerly to discover what had created this

impression : she thought of every look and every word which she had seen upon the young man's countenance, or heard from his lips ; and she fixed, at length, more upon the menacing scowl which she had marked upon his brow in the cottage, than even upon the menacing language which he had held when her father's name was mentioned.

Sleep visited not her eyelids for many an hour ; and when at length her eyes closed through fatigue, her slumber was restless and dreamful. She fancied she saw John Aycliffe holding Sir Philip on the ground, and trying to strangle him. She strove to scream for help ; but her lips seemed paralyzed, and there was no sound. That strange anguish of sleep—the anguish of impotent, strong will—of powerless passion—of effort without effect—was upon her, and soon burst the bonds of slumber. It would have been impossible to endure it long. Every one must have felt that it is greater than any mortal agony ; and that if he could endure more

than a moment, it would slay him in his sleep, like a treacherous enemy.

Emily woke unrefreshed, and rose pale and sad. I cannot say that Mrs. Hazleton, when she beheld her young friend's changed look, felt any great compunction. If she had no desire to torture, which I will not pretend to say, she did not at all object to see her victim suffer. But Emily's pale cheek and distressed look afforded indications still more satisfactory; which Mrs. Hazleton remarked with the delight of a philosopher watching a successful experiment. They showed that the preparation she had made for what was coming, was even more effectual than she had expected; and so the abstract pleasure of inflicting pain on one she hated, was increased by the certainty of success.

Emily said little, and referred not at all to the subject of her thoughts, but dwelt upon it—pondered in silence. To one who knew her, she might have seemed sullen, sulky; but it was merely that one of those fits of

deep, intense communion with the inner things of the heart—those abstracted rambles through the mazy wilderness of thought, which sometimes fell upon her—was upon her now. At these times, it was very difficult to draw her spirit forth into the waking world again—to rouse her to the things about her life. It seemed as if her soul was absent far away, and that the mere animal life of the body remained. Great events might have passed before her eyes without her knowing aught of them.

On all former occasions but one, these reveries—for so I must call them—had been of a lighter and more pleasant nature. In them it had seemed as if her young spirit had been tempted away from the household paths of thought, far into tangled wilds, where it had lost itself—tempted, like other children, by the mere pleasure of the ramble—led on to catch a butterfly, or chase the rainbow. Feeling—passion—had not mingled with the dream at all, and, consequently, there had been no suffering.

I am not sure that on other occasions, when such absent fits fell upon her, Emily Hastings was not more joyous, more full of pure delight, than when in a gay and sparkling mood she moved her father's wonder at what he thought light frivolity. But now it was all bitter; the labyrinth was dark as well as intricate, and the thorns tore her as she groped for some path across the wilderness.

Before it had lasted very long—before it had at all reached its conclusion—and as she sat at the window of the drawing-room, gazing out upon the sky, without seeing either white cloud or blue expanse, Sir Philip Hastings himself, on a short journey for some magisterial purpose, entered the room, spoke a few words to Mrs. Hazleton, and then turned to his daughter. Had he been half-an-hour later, Emily would have cast her arms round his neck and told him all; but, as it was, she remained self-involved even in his presence—answered, indeed, mechanically—spoke words of affection

with an absent air, and let her mind still run upon the path it had chosen.

Sir Philip had no time to stay till this fit was past, and Mrs. Hazleton was glad to get rid of him civilly, before any other act of the drama began.

But his daughter's mood did not escape Sir Philip's eyes. I have said that for her he was full of observation, though he often read the results wrongly ; and now he remarked Emily's mood with doubt, and not with pleasure.

"What can this mean ?" he asked himself. "Can anything have gone wrong ? It is strange, very strange. Perhaps her mother was right, after all ; and it might have been better to take her to the capital."

Thus thinking, Sir Philip himself fell into a reverie, not at all unlike that in which he had found his daughter. Yet he understood not hers, and pondered upon it as something strange and inexplicable.

In the meantime Emily thought on ; till,

at length, Mrs. Hazleton reminded her that they were to go that day upon an expedition to the waterfall. She rose mechanically, sought her room, dressed, and gazed from the window.

It is wonderful, however, how small a thing will sometimes take the mind, as it were, by the hand, and lead it back out of the shadow into sunshine. From the lawn below the windows, a light bird sprang up into the air, quivered upon its twinkling wings, uttered a note or two, and then soared higher ; and each moment, as it rose up, up, into the sky, the song, like a spirit heavenward bound, grew stronger and more strong, and flooded the air with melody.

Emily watched it as it rose, listened to it as it sang. Its upward flight seemed to carry her spirit above the dark things on which it brooded, its thrilling voice to waken her to cheerful life again. There is a high holiness in a lark's song, on hearing which, hard must be the heart, and stony

and corrupt that does not raise the voice, and join its praise of God.

When she went down again into the drawing-room, she was quite a different being ; and Mrs. Hazleton marvelled what could have happened so to change her. Had she been told that it was a lark's song, she would have laughed the speaker to scorn. She was not one to feel it.

I will not pause upon the journey of the morning, nor describe the beautiful fall of the river that they visited, nor tell how it came rushing over the precipice, nor how the rocks dashed it into diamond sparkles, nor how rainbows bannered the conflict of the waters, and boughs waved over the struggling stream like plumes. It was a sweet and pleasant sight, suggestive of meditation ; and Mrs. Hazleton hoped it would produce in the mind of Emily those softening influences which teach the heart to yield readily to the hard things of life.

There is not, perhaps, a more beautiful nor a more frequently applicable allegory, than that of the famous Amreeta Cup. I know not whether it was devised by Southey, or borrowed by him from the rich store of instructive fable hidden in oriental tradition. It is long, long since I read it ; yet every word is remembered whenever I see the different effect which scenes, circumstances, and events, produce upon different characters. It is shown by the poet, that the cup of divine wine gave life and immortality, and excellence super-human, and bliss beyond belief, to the pure, high heart ; but to the dark, earthly, and evil, it brought death, destruction, and despair. We may extend the lesson a little, and discern in the Amreeta wine the Spirit of God pervading all his works ; but producing, in those who see and taste, an effect for good and evil, according to the nature of the recipient. The strong, powerful, self-willed, passionate character of Mrs. Hazleton, found in the

calm, meditative fall of the cataract, in the ever-shifting play of the wild waters, and in the watchful stillness of the air around, a softening, enfeebling, intenerating influence. The gentle character of Emily turned from the scene with a heart raised, rather than depressed, a spirit better prepared to combat with evil and with sorrow, full of love and trust in God, and a confidence strong beyond the strength of this world. There is a voice of prophecy in waterfalls, and mountains, and lakes, and streams, and sunny lands, and clouds, and storms, and bright sun-sets. The face of Nature, everywhere, tells the destiny, not of one, but of many, and, at all events, foreshows the unutterable mercy reserved for those who trust. It is a prophecy—and an exhortation too. The words are, “Be holy, and be happy!” The God who speaks is true and glorious. Be true, and inherit glory.

Emily had been cheerful as they went.

As they returned, she was calm and firm. Readily she joined in any conversation : seldom did she fall into any fit of absent thought ; and the effect of that day's drive was anything but what Mrs. Hazleton expected or wished.

When they returned to the house, a letter was delivered to Emily Hastings, with which, the seal unbroken, she retired to her own room. The hand was unknown to her ; but, with a sort of prescience something more than natural, she divined at once from whom it came, and saw that the difficult struggle had commenced. An hour or two before, the very thought would have dismayed her. Now, the effect was but small.

She had no suspicion of the plans against her ; no idea whatsoever that people might be using her as a tool—that there was any interest contrary to her own in the conduct or management of others. Yet she turned the key in the door before she

commenced the perusal of the letter, which was to the following effect:—

“I know not,” said the writer, in a happier style than perhaps might have been expected, “how to prevail upon your goodness to pardon all I am going to say, knowing that nothing short of the circumstances in which I am placed, could excuse my approaching you even in thought. I have long known you, though you have known me only for a few short hours. I have watched you often from childhood up to womanhood; and there has been growing upon me, from very early years, a strong attachment, a deep affection, a powerful—overpowering—ardent love, which nothing can ever extinguish. Need I tell you, that the last few days would have increased that love, had increase been possible ?

“All this, however, I know, is no justification of my presuming to raise my thoughts to you—still less of my venturing to express these feelings boldly ; but it has been an excuse to myself, and in some degree to others, for abstaining hitherto from that which my best interests—a mother’s fame, and my own rights—required. The time has now come when I can no longer remain silent ; when I must throw upon you the responsibility of an important choice—when I am forced to tell you how deeply, how devotedly, I love you—in order that you may say whether you will take the only means of saving me from the most painful task I ever undertook, by conferring on me the greatest blessing that woman ever gave to man, or, on the other hand, will drive me to a task repugnant to all my feelings, but just, necessary, inevitable, in case of your refusal. Let me explain, however, that I am your cousin—the son of your father’s elder brother, by a private

marriage with a peasant girl of this county.

“The whole case is perfectly clear ; and I have proof positive of the marriage in my hands. From fear of a law-suit, and from the pressure of great poverty, my mother was induced to sacrifice her rights after her husband’s early death, still to conceal her marriage, to bear even sneers and shame, and to live upon a pittance allowed to her by her husband’s father, and secured to her by him after his own death, when she was entitled to honor and birth and distinction by the law of the land.

“One of her objects, doubtless, was to secure to herself and her son a moderate competence, as the late Sir John Hastings, my grandfather and yours, had the power of leaving all his estates to any one he pleased, the entail having ended with himself.

“For this she sacrificed her rights, her name, her fame ; and you will find, if you

look into your grandfather's will, that he took especial care that no infraction of the contract between him and her father should give cause for the assertion of her rights. Two or three mysterious clauses in that will, will show you at once, if you read them, that the whole tale I tell you is correct, and that Sir John Hastings, on the one hand, paid largely, and, on the other, threatened sternly, in order to conceal the marriage of his eldest son, and transmit the title to the second. But my mother could not bar me of my rights. She could endure unmerited shame for pecuniary advantages, if she pleased, but she could not entail shame upon me ; and were it in the power of any one to deprive me of that which Sir John Hastings left me, or to shut me out from the succession to his own estates, to which—from the fear of disclosing his great secret—he did not put any bar in his will that would have been at once an acknowledgment of my legitimacy, I would

still sacrifice all, and stand alone, friendless and portionless in the world, rather than leave my mother's fame and my own birth unvindicated. This is one of the strongest desires, the most overpowering impulses of my heart ; and neither you, nor any one, could expect me to resist it. But there is a stronger still—not an impulse, but a passion—and to that everything must yield. It is love ; and, whatever may be the difference which you see between yourself and me—however inferior I may feel myself to you in all those qualities which I myself the most admire—still I feel myself justified in placing the case clearly before you—in telling you how truly, how sincerely, how ardently, I love you, and in asking you whether you will deign to favour my suit, even now as I stand, to save me the pain and grief of contending with the father of her I love, the anguish of stripping him of the property he so well uses, and of the rank which he

adorns ; or will leave me to establish my rights, to take my just name and station, and then, when no longer appearing humble and unknown, to plead my cause with no less humility than I do at present.

“That I shall do so then, as now, rest assured—that I would do so if the rank and station to which I have a right, were a principality, do not doubt ; but I would fain, if it were possible, avoid inflicting any pain upon your father. I know not how he may bear the loss of station and of fortune—I know not what effect the struggles of a court of law, and inevitable defeat, may produce, being only acquainted with him by general repute. I cannot tell what may be the effect of mortification and the loss of all he has hitherto enjoyed. He has the reputation of a good, a just, and a wise man ; somewhat vehement in feeling, somewhat proud of his position. You must judge him rather than I ; but, I beseech you, consider him in this matter.

“At any time, and at all times, my love will be the same. Nothing can change me—nothing can alter or affect the deep love I bear you. When casting from me the cloud which has hung upon my birth, when assuming the rank, and taking possession of the property, that is my own, I shall still love you as devotedly as ever—still as earnestly seek your hand. But oh! how I long to avoid all the pangs, the mischances, the anxieties to every one, the ill-feeling, the contention, the animosity, which must ever follow such a struggle as that between your father and myself! Oh, how I long to owe everything to you—even the station—even the property—even the fair name that is my own by right. Nay, more, far more—to owe you guidance and direction—to owe you support and instruction—to owe you all that may improve, and purify, and elevate me.

“Oh, Emily, dear cousin, let me be your debtor in all things. You who first gave

me the thought of rising above fate, and making myself worthy of the high fortunes which I have long known awaited me, perfect your work, redeem me for ever from all that is unworthy, save me from bitter regrets, and your father from disappointment, sorrow, and poverty, and render me all that I long to be,

“Yours, and for ever,

“JOHN HASTINGS.”

Very well done, Mrs. Hazleton!—but somewhat too well done. There was a difference, a difference so strange, so unaccountable, between the style of this letter, both in thought and composition, and the ordinary style and manner of John Ayliffe, that it could not fail to strike even the eyes of Emily. For a moment, she felt a little confused—though not undecided. There was no hesitation—no doubt as to

her own conduct. For an instant, it crossed her mind that this young man had deeper, finer feelings than appeared upon the surface—that his manner might be more in fault than his nature. But there were things in the letter itself which she did not like—that, without any laboured analysis, or deep, searching criticism, brought to her mind the conviction that the words, the arguments, the inducements employed, were those of art rather than feeling—that the mingling of threats towards her father, however veiled with professions of love towards herself, was in itself ungenerous—that the objects, and the means, were not so high-toned as the professions—that there was something sordid, base, ignoble, in the whole proceeding. It required no careful thought to arrive at such a conclusion—no second reading ; and her mind was made up at once.

The deep reverie into which she had fallen in the morning, had done her good :

it had disentangled thought, and left the heart and judgment clear. The fair, natural scene she had passed through since, the intercourse with God's works, had done her still more good—refreshed and strengthened and elevated the spirit ; and, after a very brief pause, she drew the table towards her, sat down, and wrote. As she did so, she thought of her father, and she believed from her heart that the words she used were those which he would wish her to employ. They were to the following effect :—

“SIR,

“Your letter, as you may suppose, has occasioned me great pain, and the more so, as I am compelled to say, not only that I cannot return your affection now, but can hold out no hope to you of

ever returning it. I am obliged to speak decidedly, as I should consider myself most base if I could, for one moment, trifle with feelings such as those which you express.

“In regard to your claims upon my father’s estate, and to the rank which he believes himself to hold by just right, I can form no judgment ; and could have wished that they had never been mentioned to me before they had been made known to him.

“I never in my life knew my father do an unjust or ungenerous act ; and I am quite sure that, if convinced another had a just title to all that he possesses on earth, he would strip himself of it as readily as he would of a soiled garment. My father would disdain to hold for an hour the rightful property of another. You have, therefore, only to lay your reasons before him, and you may be sure that they will have just consideration, and yourself full justice.

I trust that you will do so soon, as to give the first intelligence of such claims would be too painful a task for

“ Your faithful servant,

“ EMILY HASTINGS.”

She read her letter over twice, and was satisfied with it. Sealing it carefully, she gave it to her own maid for despatch ; and then paused for a moment, giving way to some temporary curiosity as to who could have aided in the composition of the letter she had received ; for John Ayliffe's alone she could not and would not believe it to be. She cast such thoughts from her very speedily, however ; and, strange to say, her heart seemed lightened now that the moment of trial had come and gone—now that a torturing point in her fate seemed to have passed.

Mrs. Hazleton was surprised to see her re-enter the drawing-room with a look of relief. She saw that the matter was decided ; but she was too wise to conclude that it was decided according to her wishes.

CHAPTER IV.

MARLOW reasoned with his own heart. For the first time in his life it had proved rebellious. It would have its own way. It would not give any account of its conduct. Why it had beat so, why it had thrilled so, why it had experienced so many changes of feeling, when he saw John Ayliffe sitting beside Emily Hastings, and when Emily Hastings had risen with so joyous a smile to greet him, it would not explain at all. And now he argued the point with it syste-

matically, with a determination to get to the bottom of the matter one way or another. He asked it, as if it had been a separate individual, if it was in love with Emily Hastings. The question was too direct ; and the heart said, "It rather thought not."

Was it quite sure ? he asked again. The heart was silent, and seemed to be considering. Was it jealous ? he enquired. "Oh, dear, no ! not in the least."

Then why did it go on in such a strange, capricious, unaccountable way, when a good-looking, vulgar young man was seen sitting beside Emily ?

The heart said, "It could not tell ; that it was its nature to do so."

Marlow was not to be so put off. He was determined to know more ; and he argued—"If it be your nature to do so, you of course do the same when you see other young men sitting by other young women." The heart was puzzled, and did not reply ; and then Marlow begged a defi-

nite answer to this question :—"If you were to hear to-morrow that Emily Hastings was going to be married to this youth, or to any other man, young or old, what would you do then?"

"Break!" said the heart; and Marlow asked no more questions.

Knowing how dangerous it is to enter into such interrogatories on horseback, when the pulse is accelerated and the nervous system all in a flutter, he had waited till he got into his own dwelling; and had seated himself in his chair ere he began, that he might deal with the rebellious spirit in his breast astutely, and calmly likewise; but, as he came to the end of the conversation, he rose up, resolving to order a fresh horse, and ride instantly away to confer with Sir Philip Hastings. In so doing, he looked round the room. It was not very well or very fully furnished. The last proprietor before Mrs. Hazleton had not been very fond of books,

and had never thought of a library. When Marlow brought his own books down, he had ordered some cases to be made by a country carpenter, which fitted, but did not ornament the room. They gave it a raw, desolate aspect, and made him, by a natural projection of thought, think ill of the accommodation of the whole house, as soon as he began to entertain the idea of Emily Hastings ever becoming its mistress. Then he went on to ask himself—"What have I to offer for the treasure of her hand? What have I to offer her, but the hand of a very simple, undistinguished country gentleman—quite, quite unworthy of her? What have I to offer Sir Philip Hastings as an alliance worthy even of his consideration?—A good, unstained name; but no rank, and a fortune not above mediocrity. Marry! A fitting match for the heiress of the Hastings and the Marshal families."

He gazed round him, and his heart fell.

A little boy, with a pair of wings on his shoulders, and the end of a bow peeping up near his neck, stood close behind Marlow, and whispered in his ear, "Never mind all that—only try."

And Marlow resolved he would try ; but yet he hesitated how to do so. Should he go himself to Sir Philip ? He feared a rebuff. Should he write ? No, that was cowardly. Should he tell his love to Emily first, and strive to win her affection, ere he breathed it to her father ? No, that would be dishonest, if he had a doubt of her father's consent. At length he made up his mind to go in person to Sir Philip ; but the discussion and consideration had been so long, that it was too late to ride over that night, and the journey was put off till the following day. That day, as early as possible, he set out. He called it as early as possible, and it *was* early for a visit ; but the moment one fears a rebuff from anybody, one grows marvellously punctilious. When his horse

was brought round, he began to fancy that he should be too soon for Sir Philip ; that his coming so early would excite surprise ; and he had the horse walked up and down for half an hour.

What would he have given for that half hour, when, on reaching Sir Philip's door, he found that Emily's father had gone out, and was not expected back till late in the day. Angry with himself, and a good deal disappointed, he returned to his home, which, somehow, looked far less cheerful than usual. He could take no pleasure in his books or in his pictures ; and even thought was unpleasant to him, for, under the influence of expectation, it became but a calculation of chances, for which he had but scanty data. One thing, indeed, he learned from the passing of that evening, which was, that home and home happiness was lost to him thenceforth without Emily Hastings.

The following day saw him early in the saddle, and riding away as if some beast

of the chase were before him. Indeed, man's love, when it is worth anything, has always a smack of the hunter in it. Marlow cared not for high roads or by paths; hedges and ditches offered small impediments. Straight across the country he went, until he approached the end of his journey; but then he suddenly pulled in his rein, and began to ask himself if he were a madman. He was passing over the Marshal property at the time, the inheritance of Emily's mother; and the thought of all she was heir to, cooled his ardour with doubt and apprehension. He would have given one half of all that he possessed, that she had been a peasant girl, and that he might have lived with her upon the other half.

Then he began to think of all that he should say to Sir Philp Hastings, and how he should say it; and he felt very uneasy in his mind. Then he felt angry with himself for his own sensations, and tried philosophy, and scolded his own heart.

But philosophy and scolding had no effect ; and so, cantering easily through the park, he stopped at the gate of the house, and dismounted.

Sir Philip was at home this time, and Marlow was ushered into the little room where the baronets sat in the morning, with the library hard by, to have his books at hand. But Sir Philip was not reading now. On the contrary, he was in a fit of thought, and that, if one might judge by the contraction of his brow, and the drawing-down of the corners of his lips, was not a very pleasant one.

Marlow fancied he had come at an inauspicious moment ; and the first words of Sir Philp, though kind and friendly, were not at all harmonious with the feelings of love in his visitor's heart.

“ Welcome, my young friend,” he said, looking up. “ I have been thinking this morning over the laws and habits of different nations, ancient and modern, and

would fain satisfy myself if I am right in the conclusion that we, in this land, leave too little free action to individual judgment. No man, we say, must take the law in his own hands ; yet how often do we break this rule—how often are we compelled to break it ! If you, with a gun in your hand, saw a man at fifty or sixty paces about to murder a child or a woman, without any means of stopping the blow except by using your weapon, what would you do ?”

“Shoot him on the spot,” replied Marlow, at once ; and then added, “if I were quite certain of his intention.”

“Of course, of course,” rejoined Sir Philip ; “and yet, my good friend, if you did so without witnesses—supposing the child too young to testify, or the woman sleeping at whom the blow was aimed—you would be hung for your just, wise, charitable act.”

“Perhaps so,” said Marlow, abruptly ; “but I would do so, nevertheless.”

“Right, right,” exclaimed Sir Philip, rising and shaking Marlow’s hand ; “right, and like yourself. There are cases when, with a clear consciousness of the rectitude of our purpose, and a strong confidence in the justice of our judgment, we should step over all human laws, be the result to ourselves what it may. Do you remember a man, one Cutter, to whom you taught a severe lesson on the very first day I had the pleasure of knowing you ? I should have been undoubtedly justified morally—and perhaps even legally also—in sending my sword through his body, when he attacked me that day. Had I done so, I should have saved a valuable human life, spared the world the spectacle of a great crime, and preserved an excellent husband and father to his wife and children. That very man has murdered the gamekeeper of the Earl of Selby ; and, being called to the spot yesterday, I had to commit him for that crime, upon evidence which left

not a doubt of his guilt. I spared him when he assaulted me, from a weak and unworthy feeling of compassion, although I knew the man's character, and dimly foresaw his career. I have regretted it since, but never so much as yesterday. This, of course, is no parallel case to that which I just now proposed; but the one led my mind to the other."

"Did the wretched man admit his guilt?" asked Marlow.

"He did not, and could not, deny it," answered Sir Philip. "During the examination, he maintained a hard, sullen silence, and only said, when I ordered his committal, that I ought not to be so hard upon him for that offence, as it was the best service he could have done me, for that he had silenced a man whose word could strip me of all I possessed."

"What could he mean?" asked Marlow, eagerly.

"Nay, I know not," responded Sir Philip,

in an indifferent tone ; "crushed vipers often turn to bite. The man he killed was the son of the former sexton here—an honest, good creature, for whom I obtained his place : his murderer is a reckless villain, on whose word there is no dependence. Let us give no thought to it. He has held some such strange language before ; but it never produced a fear that my property would be lost or diminished. We do not hold fee-simples on the tenure of a rogue's good pleasure. Why do you smile ?"

"For what will at first sight seem a strange, unnatural reason for a friend to give, Sir Philip," replied Marlow, determined not to lose the opportunity. "For your own sake, and for your country's, I am bound to hope that your property may never be lost or diminished ; but every selfish feeling would induce me to wish it were less than it is."

Sir Philip Hastings was no reader of

riddles ; and he looked puzzled. But Marlow walked frankly to him, and took his hand, saying—

“ I have not judged it right, Sir Philip, to remain one day after I discovered what are my own feelings towards your daughter, without informing you fully of their nature, that you may at once decide upon your future demeanour towards one to whom you have hitherto shown much kindness, and who would on no account abuse it. I was not at all aware how this passion had grown upon me, till the day before yesterday, when I saw your daughter at Mrs. Hazleton's, and some accidental circumstances revealed to me the state of my own heart.”

Sir Philip looked neither surprised nor displeased ; but, after a moment's thought, enquired—

“ What says Emily, my young friend ?”

“ She says nothing, Sir Philip,” replied

Marlow ; “ for, neither by word or look, as far as I know, have I betrayed my own feelings towards her. I would not, believe me, do so, until I had given you the opportunity of deciding, unfettered by any consideration for her, whether you would permit me to pursue my suit or not ?”

Sir Philip was in a reasoning mood that day, and he tortured Marlow by asking—

“ And would you always think it necessary, Marlow, to obtain a parent’s consent before you endeavoured to gain the affection of a girl you loved ?”

“ Not always,” replied the young man ; “ but I should think it always wrong to violate any confidence, Sir Philip. You have been kind to me—trusted me—had no doubt of me ; and to say one word to Emily which might thwart your plans, or meet your disapproval, would be to show myself unworthy of *your* esteem and *her* affection.”

Sir Philip mused, and then said, as if speaking to himself—

"I had some idea this might turn out so ; but not so soon. I fancy, however," he continued, addressing Marlow, "that you must have betrayed your feelings more than you thought, my young friend ; for yesterday morning I found Emily in a strange, thoughtful, abstracted mood, showing that some strong feelings were busy at her heart."

"Some other cause," said Marlow, quickly ; "I cannot even flatter myself that she was thinking of me. When I saw her the day before, a young man was sitting with her and Mrs. Hazleton—John Ayliffe, I think, is his name ; and I will own I thought his presence seemed to annoy her."

"John Ayliffe at Mrs. Hazleton's !" exclaimed Sir Philip, his brow growing very dark. "John Ayliffe in my daughter's society ! Well might the poor child look

thoughtful—and yet why should she? She knows nothing of his history. What is he like, Marlow—how does he bear himself?”

“He is certainly handsome, with fine features, and a good figure,” replied Marlow; “indeed, it struck me there was some resemblance between him and yourself. But there is a want I cannot well define in his appearance, Sir Philip—in his air, in his carriage, whether still or in motion, which fixes upon him what I am accustomed to call ‘a class mark,’ and that not of the best. Depend upon it, however, that it was annoyance at being brought into society which she disliked, that affected your daughter as you have mentioned. My love for her, she is and must be ignorant of; for I stayed there but a few minutes, and before that day I knew it not myself. And now, Sir Philip, what say you to my suit? May I—as some of your words lead me to hope—may I pursue that

suit, and strive to win your dear daughter's love?"

"Of course," returned Sir Philip Hastings; "of course. A vague fancy has long been floating in my brain that it might be so some day. She is too young to marry yet, and it will be sad to part with her when the time does come; but you have my consent to seek her affection, if she can give it to you. She must herself decide."

"Have you considered fully," asked Marlow, "that I have neither fortune nor rank to offer her? that I am by no means—"

Sir Philip waved his hand almost impatiently.

"What skills it, talking of rank or wealth?" he said. "You are a gentleman by birth, education, manners. You have easy competence. My Emily will desire no more for herself, and I can desire no more for her. You will endeavour, I know, to make her happy, and will succeed, be-

cause you love her. As for myself, were I to choose out all the men I know, you would be the man. Fortune is a good adjunct; but it is no essential. I do not promise her to you. That *she* must do; but if she says she will give you her hand it shall be yours."

Marlow thanked him, with joy such as may well be conceived; but Sir Philip's thoughts reverted at once to his daughter's situation at Mrs. Hazleton's.

"She must stay there no longer, Marlow," he said. "I will send for her home without delay; then you will have plenty of opportunity for the telling of your own tale to her ear, and seeing how you may speed with her. But, at all events, she must stay no longer in a house where she can meet with John Ayliffe. Mrs. Hazleton makes me marvel—a woman so proud, so refined!"

"It is but justice to say," observed Marlow, thoughtfully, "that I have some vague

recollection of Mrs. Hazleton having intimated that they had met that gentleman by chance, upon some expedition of pleasure. But had I not better, my dear sir, communicate my hopes and wishes to Lady Hastings ?”

“That is not needful,” replied Emily’s father, somewhat sternly. “I promise her to you, Marlow, if she herself consents. My good wife will not oppose my wishes or my daughter’s happiness: nor do I *suffer* opposition upon occasions of importance. I will tell Lady Hastings my determination myself.”

Marlow was too wise to say another word ; but agreed to come on the following day to dine and sleep at the Hall, and took his leave for the time. It was not without some satisfaction that he heard Sir Philip order a horse to be saddled, and a man to prepare to carry a letter to Mrs. Hazleton ; for doubts were rapidly possessing themselves of his mind—not in

regard to Emily, but in reference to the conduct and objects of Mrs. Hazleton herself.

The letter was dispatched immediately after his departure, recalling Emily to her father's house, and announcing that the carriage would be sent for her early on the following morning. That being done, Sir Philip repaired to his wife's drawing-room, and informed her that he had given his consent to his young friend Marlow's suit to their daughter. His tone was one that admitted no reply, and Lady Hastings made none; but she entered her protest quite as well by falling into a violent fit of hysterics.

CHAPTER V.

IN a very gaudily furnished parlour, and in a very gaudy dress, sat a female of some eight or nine-and-thirty years of age, with many traces of beauty still to be perceived in a face of no very intellectual expression. Few persons, however, would have recognised in her the fair and faulty girl whom we have depicted weeping bitterly over the fate of Sir Philip Hastings's elder brother, and over the terrible situation in which he left her. Her features had much changed:

the girlish expression—the first bloom of youth was gone. The light, graceful figure was lost ; but the mind had changed as greatly as the person, though, like it, the heart yet retained some traces of the original. When first she appeared before the reader's eyes, though weak and yielding, she was by no means ill-disposed. She had committed an error—a great and fatal one ; but at heart she was innocent and honest. She was, however, like all people of plastic clay, moulded easily by circumstances into any form ; and, in her, circumstances had shaped her gradually into a much worse form than Nature had originally given her. To defraud, to cheat, to wrong, had at one time been most abhorrent to her principles. She had taken no active part in her father's dealings with old Sir John Hastings ; and had she known all that he had said and sworn, would have shrunk with horror from the scene. But, during her father's short life, she had been often told by himself, and,

after his death, had been frequently assured by the old woman Danby, that she was rightly and truly the widow of John Hastings ; although, because it would be difficult to prove, her father had consented to take an annuity for herself and her son, rather than enter into a law-suit with a powerful man ; and she had gradually brought herself to believe that she had been her lover's wife, because in one of his ardent letters he had called her so, to stifle the voice of remorse in her bosom. The conviction had grown upon her ; till now, after a lapse of more than twenty years, she had forgotten all her former doubts and scruples, believed herself and her son to be injured and deprived of their just rights, and was ready to assert her marriage boldly, though she had at one time felt and acknowledged that there was no marriage at all, and that the words her seducer had used, were but intended to soothe her regret and terror.

There was a point, however, beyond

which she was not prepared to go. She still shrank from giving false details, from perjuring herself in regard to particular facts. Her marriage, she thought, might be good in the eyes of Heaven, of herself, and of her lover ; but to render it good in the eyes of the law, she had found would require proofs that she could not give—oaths that she dared not take.

Another course, however, had been proposed for her ; and now she sat in that small parlour, gaudily dressed, as I have said, but dressed evidently for a journey. Tears, indeed, were in her eyes ; and, as her son stood by her side, she looked up in his face with a beseeching look, as if she would fain have said, “ Pray do not drive me to this !”

But young John Ayliffe had no remorse ; and, if he spoke tenderly to her who had spoiled his youth, it was only because his object was to persuade and cajole.

“ Indeed, mother,” he said, “ it is absolutely necessary, or I would not ask you to

go. You know quite well that I would rather have you here ; and it will only be for a short time, till the trial is over. Lawyer Shanks told you himself, that if you stayed they would have you into court, and cross-examine you to death ; and you know quite well you could not keep in one story if they brow-beat and puzzled you."

"I would say anywhere that my marriage was a good one," replied his mother, "but I would not swear all that Shanks would have had me, John ; no, I would not swear that, for Doctor Paulding had nothing to do with it, and if he were to repeat it all over to me a thousand times, I am sure that I should make a blunder, even if I consented to tell such a falsehood. My father and good Mrs. Danby used always to say that the mutual consent made a marriage, and a good one too. Now, your father's own letter shows that *he* consented to it ; and God knows *I* did. But these lawyers will not let well alone, and, by trying to mend things, make them

worse, I think. However, I suppose you have gone too far to go back ; and so I must go to a strange, out-of-the-way country, and hide myself, and live quite lonely. Well, I am ready. I am ready to make any sacrifice for you, my boy—though it is very hard, I must say.”

As she spoke, she rose, with her eyes running over ; and her son kissed her, and assured her that her absence should not be long. But as she was moving towards the door, he put a paper—a somewhat long one—on the table, where a pen was already in the inkstand, saying,

“Just sign this before you go, dear mother.”

“Oh, I cannot sign anything,” cried she, wiping her eyes. “How can you be so cruel, John, as to ask me to sign anything just now, when I am parting with you ? What is it you want ?”

“It is only a declaration that you are truly my father’s widow,” said John Ayliffe.

"See here:—The declaration,' &c. You need not read it ; but only just sign here."

She hesitated an instant ; but his power over her was complete ; and, though she much doubted the contents, she signed the paper with a trembling hand. Then came a parting, full of real tenderness on her part, and assumed affection and regret on his. The post-chaise, which had been standing for an hour at the door, rolled away, and John Ayliffe walked back into the house.

When there, he paced up and down the room for some time, with an impatient thoughtfulness, if I may use the term, in his looks, which had but little to do with his mother's departure. He was glad that she was gone—still more glad that she had signed the paper ; and now he seemed waiting for something eagerly expected.

At length, there came a sound of a quick trotting horse ; and John Ayliffe took the paper from the table hastily, and put it in his pocket. But the visitor was not the

one he expected. It was only a servant with a letter ; and, as the young man took it from the hand of the maid who brought it in, and gazed at the address, his cheek flushed a little, and then turned somewhat pale. He muttered to himself—

“ She has not taken long to consider ! ”

As soon as the slip-shod girl had gone out of the room, he broke the seal, and read the brief answer which Emily had returned to his declaration.

It would not be easy for an artist to paint, and it is impossible for a writer to describe, the expression which came upon his face as he perused the words of decided rejection, which were written on that sheet ; but certainly had poor Emily heard how he cursed her, how he vowed to have revenge, and to humble her pride, as he called it, she would have rejoiced that such a man had obtained no hold upon her affection, no command of her fate.

John Ayliffe was still in the midst of

his tempest of passion, when, without being prepared for his appearance, Mr. Shanks entered the room. His face wore a dark and anxious expression, which even habitual cunning could not banish ; but the state in which he found his young client seemed to take him quite by surprise.

"Why, what is the matter, John?" he cried ; "what, in the name of fortune, has happened here?"

"What has happened !" echoed John Ayliffe. "Look there !"

And he handed Mr. Shanks the letter.

The attorney took it, and, with his keen, weazel eyes, read it as deliberately as he would have read an ordinary law paper. He then handed it back to his young client, saying,

"The respondent does not put in a bad answer."

"Damn the respondent !" exclaimed John Ayliffe. "But she shall smart for it."

“Well, well, this cannot be helped,” rejoined Mr. Shanks; “no need of putting yourself in a passion. You don’t care two straws about her; and if you get the property without the girl, so much the better. You can then have the pick of all the pretty women in the county.”

John Ayliffe mused gloomily, for Mr. Shanks was not altogether right in his conclusion as to the young man’s feelings towards Emily. Perhaps, when he began the pursuit, he cared little about its success; but, like other beasts of prey, he had become eager as he ran: desire had arisen in the chase; and, though mortified vanity had the greatest share in his actual feelings, he felt something beyond that.

While he mused, Mr. Shanks was musing also, calculating results and combinations; but at length he said, in a low tone,

“Is she gone? Have you got that accomplished?”

"Gone!—yes—do you mean my mother? Damn it, yes—she is gone, to be sure. Didn't you meet her?"

"No," said Mr. Shanks; "I came the other way. That is lucky, however; but hark'ee, John. Something very unpleasant has happened, and we must take some steps about it directly; for, if they work him well, that fellow is likely to 'peach."

"Who? What the devil are you talking about?" asked John Ayliffe, with his passion unsubdued.

"Why, that blackguard whom you *would* employ—Master Tom Cutter," answered Mr. Shanks. "You know I always set my face against it, John; and now—"

"'Peach!" cried John Ayliffe; "Tom Cutter will no more 'peach than he'll fly in the air. He's not of the 'peaching sort."

"Perhaps not, where a few months' imprisonment are concerned," answered Mr. Shanks; "but the matter here is his neck, and

that makes a mighty difference, let me tell you. Now listen to me, John, and don't interrupt me till I've done ; for be sure that we have got into a very unpleasant mess, which we may have some difficulty in getting out of. You sent over Tom Cutter to see if he could not persuade young Scantling, Lord Selby's gamekeeper, to remember something about the marriage when he was along with his father, the old sexton. Now, how he and Tom managed their matters I don't know ; but Tom gave him a lick on the head with a stick, which killed him on the spot. As the devil would have it, all this was seen by two people—a labourer working in a ditch hard by, and Scantling's son, a boy of ten years old. The end of it is, Tom was instantly pursued and apprehended ; your good uncle, Sir Philip, was called to take the depositions, and, without any remand whatever, committed our friend for trial. Tom's only hope is to prove that it was a blow of chance-medley, or to bring it under manslaughter as a thing

done in a passion ; and, if he thinks that being employed by you will be any defence, or will show that it was a sudden burst of rage without premeditation, he will tell the whole story as soon as he would eat his dinner."

"I'll go over to him directly, and tell him to hold his tongue," cried John Ayliffe, now fully awakened to the perils of the case.

"Pooh, pooh ! don't be a fool," said Mr. Shanks, contemptuously. "Are you going to let the man see that you are afraid of him—that he has got you in his power ? Besides, they will not let you in. No ; the way must be this :—I must go over to him as his legal adviser, and I can dress you up as my clerk. It will please him to find that we do not abandon him ; and we must contrive to turn his defence quite another way, whether he hang for it or not. We must make it out that Scantling swore he had been poaching,

when he had done nothing of the kind, and that, in the quarrel that followed, he struck the blow accidentally. We can persuade him that this is his best defence, which perhaps it is after all ; for nobody can prove that he was poaching, inasmuch as he really was not ; whereas, if he were made to show that he killed a man while attempting to suborn evidence, he would speedily find himself under a cross-beam."

"Suborn evidence!" muttered John Ayliffe to himself ; for, though ready to do any act that might advance his purpose, he did not like to hear it called by its right name.

However that might be, he agreed to the course proposed by the attorney ; and it was determined that, waiting for the fall of night, they should both go over to the prison together, and demand admittance to the felon's cell. The conversation then reverted to Emily's distinct rejection of the young man's suit ; and long did

the two ponder over it, considering what might be the effect of the plans they were pursuing.

"It may hurry us desperately," said Mr. Shanks, at length, "unless we can get her to hold her tongue; for depend upon it, as soon as Sir Philip hears what you are doing, he will take his measures accordingly. Don't you think you and Mrs. Hazleton together can manage to frighten her into silence? If I were you, I would get upon my horse's back directly, ride over, and see what can be done. Your fair friend there will give you every help, depend upon it."

John Aycliffe smiled.

"I will see," he said. "Mrs. Hazleton is very kind about it, and I dare say will help, for I am quite sure she has got some purpose of her own to serve."

The attorney grinned, but made no answer: and, in a short space of time, John Aycliffe was on the road to Mrs.

Wellington.

After a quarter of an hour's private conversation with the lady of the mansion, he was admitted to the room in which Emily sat, unconscious of his being in the house. She was displeased and alarmed at seeing him ; but his words and his conduct after he entered, frightened and displeased her still more. He demanded secrecy in a stern and peremptory tone, and threatened with vague, but not ill-advised, menaces, to be the ruin of her father and his offspring, if she breathed one word of what had taken place between her and himself. He sought, moreover, to obtain from her a promise of secrecy ; but Emily would on no account consent, although he terrified her greatly ; and he left her still in doubt as to whether his secret was safe or not.

With Mrs. Hazleton he held another conference ; but from her he received better assurances.

"Don't be afraid," she said ; " I will manage it for you. She shall not betray you ; at least, for a time. However, you

had better proceed as rapidly as possible ; and if the power of pursuing your claims be wanting—I mean in point of money—have no scruple in applying to me.”

Putting on an air of queenly dignity, Mrs. Hazleton proceeded in search of Emily, as soon as the young man was gone. She found her in tears ; and, sitting down by her side, she took her hand in a kindly manner, saying—

“ My dear child, I am very sorry for all this ; but it is really in some degree your own fault—nay, you need not explain anything. I have just had young Ayliffe with me ; he has told me all, and I have dismissed him with a sharp rebuke. If you had confided to me last night, that he had proposed to you, and you had rejected him, I would have taken care that he should not have admittance to you. Indeed, I am surprised that he should presume to propose at all without longer acquaintance. But he seems to have agitated and terrified much ; what did he want ? ”

"He endeavoured to make me promise," replied Emily, "that I would not tell my father or any one of what had occurred."

"Foolish boy ! He might have taken that for granted," replied Mrs. Hazleton. "No woman of any delicacy ever speaks of a matter of this kind when once she has taken upon herself to reject a proposal unconditionally. If she wishes for advice," continued the lady, recollecting herself, "or thinks that the suit may be pressed improperly, of course she is free to ask counsel and assistance of some female friend on whom she can depend. But the moment the thing is decided, of course she is silent for ever ; for nothing can be more a matter of honourable confidence than an avowal of honourable love. I will write him a note, and tell him he is in no danger, but warn him not to present himself here again so long as you are with me."

Emily made no answer, trying to decide in her own mind whether Mrs. Hazleton's

reasoning was right ; and that lady choosing, from her silence, to take her assent for granted, hurried away, to give her no opportunity of retracting.

CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE the door of a large brick building, with no windows towards the street, and tall walls rising up till they overtopped the neighbouring houses, stood two men, about an hour after night had fallen, waiting for admittance. The great, large iron bar, which formed the knocker of the door, had descended twice with a heavy thump, but yet no one had appeared in answer to the summons. It was again in the hands of Mr. Shanks, and ready to descend, when

the rattling of keys was heard inside ; bolts were withdrawn, and bars cast down, and one half of the door was opened, displaying a man with a lantern, which he held up to gaze at his visitors. His face was fat, bloated, and covered with a great number of spots ; and his swollen eyelids made his little keen black eyes look smaller than they naturally were ; while his nose, much in the shape of a hors-echestnut, blushed with the hues of early morning

“How are you, Cram, how are you ?” asked the attorney. “I haven’t been here for a long time ; but you know me, I suppose ?”

“Oh, yes, I know you, Master Shanks,” replied the jailer, winking one of his small black eyes. “Who have you come to see ? —Betty Diaper, I’ll warrant, who prigged the gentleman’s purse at the bottom of the bill. She’s as slink a diver as any on the lay ; but she’s got the shiners. and so

will have counsel to defend her before the beak, I'll bet a gallon."

"No, no," answered Mr. Shanks; "our old friend Tom Cutter wants to see me on this little affair of his."

"You'll make no hand of that, as sure as my name is Dionysius Cram," replied the jailer. "Can't prove an *alibi* there, Master Shanks, for I know them as saw him do the job; and, besides, he can't pay. What's the use of meddling with *him*? He *must* swing some time, you know; and one day's as good as another. However, come in, Master Shanks, come in. But I say—who's this here t'other chap?"

"That's my clerk," replied Mr. Shanks. "I may want him to take instructions."

The man grinned, but demurred. A crown-piece was, however, in those days the key to all jailers' hearts, and, after a shew of hesitation, Shanks and his young companion were both admitted within the gates. They now found themselves in a small square space, guarded on two sides

by tall iron railings, which bent overhead, and were let into the wall somewhat after the manner of a birdcage. On the left-hand side, however, was another brick wall, with a door and some steps leading up to it. By this entrance, Mr. Dionysius Cram led them into a small jailer's lodge, containing a table and some wooden chairs. In the wall opposite the entrance, was a strong moveable grate, between the bars of which might be seen a yawning sort of chasm, leading into the heart of the prison.

Again Mr. Cram's great keys were put in motion, and he opened the grate to let his visitors pass, eyeing John Ayliffe with considerable attention as he did so. Locking the grate carefully behind him, he lighted them on with his lantern, muttering, as he went, in the peculiar prison slang of those days, various sentences not very complimentary to the tastes and habits of John Ayliffe.

"Ay, ay," he said, "clerk be damned! One of Tom's pals, for a pint and a broiled

bone. Droll I don't know him. He must be twenty, and ought to have been in the stone pitcher often enough before now. Dare say he has been sent to Mill Dol for some minor. That's not in my department; I shall have the darbies on him some day. He'd look handsome under the tree!"

John Ayliffe had a strong inclination to knock him down, but he restrained himself; and, at length, a large, plated iron door admitted the two gentlemen into the penetralia of the temple.

A powerful smell of aqua-vitæ and other kinds of strong waters now pervaded the atmosphere, mingled with that close, sickly odour which is felt where great numbers of uncleanly human beings are closely packed together; and from some distance were heard the sounds of riotous merriment, ribald song, and hoarse, unfeeling laugh, with curses and execrations not a few. It was a time when the abominations of the prison system were at their height.

"Here, step in here," said Mr. Cram to the attorney and his companion, "and I'll bring Tom to you in a minute. He's having a lush with some of his pals; though I thought we were going to have a mill, for Jack Perkins, who is to be hanged o' Monday, roused out his slack-jaw at him for some quarrel about a gal, and Tom don't bear such-like easily. Howsumdever, they made it up, and clubbed a gallon.—Stay! I'll get you a candle-end."

And leaving them in the dark, not much, if the truth must be told, to the satisfaction of John Ayliffe, he rolled away along the passage, and remained absent several minutes.

When he returned, a clanking step followed him, as of heavy irons dragged slowly on by unaccustomed limbs, and, the moment after, Tom Cutter stood in the presence of his two friends.

The jailer brought in a piece of candle about two inches long, which he stuck into a sort of socket attached to an iron bar

projecting straight from the wall ; and, having done this, he left the three together, taking care to close and lock the door behind him.

Chair or stool in the room there was none ; and the only seat, except the floor, which the place afforded, was the edge of a small wooden bedstead, or trough as it might be called, scantily furnished with straw.

Both Mr. Shanks and John Ayliffe shook hands with the felon, whose face, though somewhat flushed with drinking, bore traces of deeper and sterner feelings than he chose to show. He seemed glad to see them, however, and said it was very kind of them to come, adding, with an enquiring look at Mr Shanks,

“ I can’t pay you, you know, Master Lawyer ; for what between my garnish and lush, I shall have only just enough to keep me till the ’sizes. I shan’t need much after that, I fancy.”

“ Pooh, pooh ! ” cried the attorney. “ Don’t be down-hearted, Tom ; and, as to pay,

never mind that; John here will pay all that's needful, and we'll have down Counsellor Twistem to work the witnesses. We can't make out an *alibi*, for the folks saw you; but we'll get you up a character, if money can make a reputation; and I never knew the time in England when it could not. We have come to consult with you at once, as to what's the best defence to be made, that we may have the story all pat and right from the beginning, and no shifting and turning afterwards."

"I wish I hadn't killed the man," said Tom Cutter, gloomily. "I shan't forget his face in a hurry as he fell over, and cried out, 'Oh! my poor—;' but the last word choked him. He couldn't get it out. I fancy he was thinking of his wife—or, may be, his children. But what could I do? He gave me a sight of bad names, and swore he would 'peach about what I wanted him to do. He called me a villain, a scoundrel, and a cheat, and a great deal more besides, till my blood got up; and,

having got the stick by the small end, I hit him with the knob on the temple. I didn't know I hit so hard; but I was in a rage."

"That's just what I thought—just what I thought," said Mr. Shanks. "You struck him without premeditation in a fit of passion. Now, if we can make out that he provoked you beyond bearing—"

"That he did," interrupted Tom Cutter.

"That's what I say," continued Mr. Shanks; "if we can make out that he provoked you beyond bearing, while you were doing nothing unlawful and wrong, that isn't murder, Tom."

"Hum," ejaculated Tom Cutter; "but how will you get that up, Mr. Shanks? I've a notion that what I went to him about, was devilish unlawful."

"Ay, but nobody knew anything of that but you and he, John Ayliffe, and I. We must keep that quite close, and get up a likely story about the quarrel. You will

have to tell it yourself, you know, Tom, though we'll make Counsellor Twistern let the jury see it beforehand in his examination."

A gleam of hope seemed to lighten the man's face ; and Mr. Shanks continued—

"We can prove, I dare say, that this fellow Scantling had a great hatred for you."

"No, he had not," said Tom Cutter. "He was more civil to me than most, for we had been boys together."

"That doesn't matter," said Mr. Shanks; "we must prove it, for that's your only chance, Tom. If we can prove that you always spoke well of him, so much the better ; but we must show that he was accustomed to abuse you, and to call you a damned ruffian and a poacher. We'll do it—we'll do it ; and then, if you stick tight to your story, we'll get you off."

"But what's the story to be, Master Shanks?" asked Tom Cutter. "I can't

learn a long one ; I never was good at learning by heart."

"Oh, no ! it shall be as short and simple as possible," replied Shanks. "You must admit having gone over to see him, and that you struck the blow that killed him. We can't get over that, Tom ; but then you must say you're exceedingly sorry, and was so the very moment after."

"So I was," said Tom Cutter.

"And your story must refer," continued Mr. Shanks, "to nothing but what took place just before the blow was struck. You must say that you heard he accused you of putting wires in Lord Selby's woods, and you went over to clear yourself, but that he abused you so violently, and insulted you so grossly, your blood got up, and you struck him, only intending to knock him down. Do you understand me ?"

"Quite well—quite well," replied Tom Cutter, his face brightening. "I do think that may do, 'specially if you can make

out that I used to speak well of him, and he to abuse me. It's an accident that might happen to any man."

"To be sure," replied Mr. Shanks. "But take care, Tom, to get your story quite right. Now let me hear what you will say."

Tom Cutter repeated the tale he had been taught, very accurately, for it was just suited to his comprehension; and Shanks rubbed his hands, saying,

"That will do—that will do."

John Ayliffe, however, was not without his anxieties; and, after a little hesitation as to how he should put the question which he meditated, he said,

"Of course, Tom, I suppose you have not told any of the fellows here what you went to Scantling for?"

The ruffian knew him better than he thought, and understood his object at once.

"No, no, John," he said; "I haven't 'peached, and shall not, be you sure of that."

If I am to die, I'll die game, depend upon it ; but I *do* think there's a chance now, and we may as well make the best of it."

"To be sure—to be sure," answered the more prudent Shanks. "You don't think, Mr. Ayliffe, that he would be fool enough to go and cut his own throat by telling any one what would be sure to hang him. That is a very green notion."

"Oh, no! nor would I say a word that could serve Sir Philip Hastings," said Tom Cutter. "He's been my enemy for this last ten year ; and I can see he would be as glad to twist my neck, as I have been to twist his hares'. Perhaps I may live to pay him yet."

"I'm not sure you might not give him a gentle rub in your defence," said John Ayliffe. "He would not like to hear that his pretty, proud daughter Emily came down to see me, as I'm sure she did, let her say what she will, when I was ill at the cottage

by the park-gates. You were in the house don't you recollect, getting a jug of beer, while I was sitting at the door when she came down."

"I remember—I remember," replied Tom Cutter, with a malicious smile. "I gave him one rub which he didn't like when he committed me; and I'll do this too."

"Take care," said Mr. Shanks; "you had better not mix up other things with your defence."

"Oh, I can do it quite easy," replied the other, with a triumphant look. "I could tell what happened then, and how I heard there that people suspected me of poaching still, though I had quite given it up, and how I determined to find out from that minute who it was accused me."

"That can do no harm," said Shanks, who had not the least objection to see Sir Philip Hastings mortified; and after about half-an-hour's further conversation, and

having supplied Tom Cutter with a small sum of money, the lawyer and his companion prepared to withdraw. Shanks whistled through the key-hole of the door, producing a shrill, loud sound, as if he were blowing over the top of a key ; and Dionysius Cram, understanding the signal, hastened to let them out.

Before we proceed farther, however, with any other personage, we may as well trace the fate of Mr. Thomas Cutter.

The assizes were approaching near at this time ; and, about a fortnight after, Tom was brought to trial. Not all the skill of Counsellor Twistem, however, nor the excellent character which Mr. Shanks tried to procure for him, had any effect ; his reputation was too well established to be affected by any *scandalous* reports of his being a peaceable and orderly man. His violent and irregular life were too well known for the jury to come to any other conclusion than that it would be a good

thing to rid the country of him; and (whether very legally or not, I cannot say) they brought in a verdict of wilful murder without quitting the box. His defence however, established for him the name of very clever fellow; and one portion of it certainly sent Sir Philip Hastings from the court thoughtful and gloomy. No recommendation to mercy having issued from the Judge, Tom Cutter was hanged in due form of law, and, to use his own words, "died game!"

CHAPTER VII.

WE must go back a little, for we have somewhat anticipated our tale. Never did summons strike more joyfully on the ear of mortal, than came that of her recall home to Emily Hastings. As so often happens to all in life, the expected pleasure had turned to ashes on the lip; and her visit to Mrs. Hazleton offered hardly one point on which memory could rest happily. Nay, more; without being able definitely to say why, when she questioned her own

heart, the character of her beautiful hostess had suffered by close inspection. She was not the same in Emily's esteem that she had been before. Emily could not point out what Mrs. Hazleton had said or done to produce such an impression ; but she was less revered. It was not alone that the trappings in which a young imagination had decked her were stripped off ; but that a baser metal beneath had here and there shone doubtfully through the gilding with which she concealed her real character.

If the summons was joyful to Emily, it was a surprise, and an unpleasant one, to Mrs. Hazleton. Not that she wished to keep her young guest with her long : for she was too keen and shrewd not to perceive that Emily could not be worked upon so easily as she had imagined ; and that, under her very youthfulness, there was a strength of character which must render one part of the plans against her certainly abortive. But Mrs. Hazleton was taken

by surprise ; she could have wished to guard against that construction of some parts of her conduct which must have been the more unpleasant because the more just. She had fancied that she would have time to give what gloss she chose to her conduct in Emily's eyes, and to prevent dangerous explanations between the father and daughter. Moreover, the suddenness of the call alarmed her, and raised doubts. Wherever there is something to be concealed, there is something to be feared ; and Mrs. Hazleton asked herself if Emily had found means to communicate to Sir Philip Hastings what had occurred with John Ayliffe.

That, however, she soon concluded was impossible. Some knowledge of the facts might nevertheless have reached him from other sources ; and Mrs. Hazleton was uneasy. Sir Philip's letter to his daughter, which Emily at once suffered her hostess to see, threw no light upon the subject. It was brief, unexplicit, and, though per-

fectly kind and tender, peremptory. It merely required her to return to the Hall, as some business rendered her presence at home necessary.

Little did Mrs. Hazleton divine the business to which Sir Philip alluded. Had she known it, who can say what might have happened ?

Terribly strong passions were within that fair bosom ; and there were moments when those strong passions mastered even strong worldly sense and habitual self-control.

There was not much time, however, for mere thought, and less for preparation. Emily departed, after having received a few words of affectionate caution from Mrs. Hazleton, delicately and skilfully put in such a manner as to produce the impression that she was speaking of subjects personally indifferent to herself—except in so much as her young friend's own happiness was concerned.

Shall we say the truth ? Emily attended

but little : her thoughts were full of her father's letter, and of the joy of returning to a home where days passed peacefully, in an even, quiet course, very different from that in which the stream of time had flowed at Mrs. Hazleton's. The love of strong emotions—the brandy-drinking of the mind—is an acquired taste. Few, very few, have it from nature. But poor Emily little knew how many strong emotions were preparing for her.

Gladly she saw the carriage roll onward, through scenes more and more familiar at every step. Gladly she saw the park-gates appear, and marked the old well-known hawthorns as they flitted by her ; and the look of joy with which she sprang into her father's arms might have convinced every heart, that there was but one home she loved.

" Now, go and dress for dinner at once, my child," said Sir Philip. " We have delayed two hours for you : be not long."

Nor was Emily long ; she could not

have been more rapid had she known that Marlow was waiting eagerly for her appearance. Well pleased, indeed, was she to see him, when she entered the drawing-room ; but for the first time since she had known him—from some cause or other—a momentary feeling of embarrassment, of timidity, came upon her, and the colour rose slightly in her cheeks. Her eyes spoke, however, more than her lips could say ; and Marlow must have been satisfied, if lovers ever could be satisfied.

Lady Hastings was lying languidly on a couch, not knowing how to intimate to her daughter her disapproval of a suit yet unknown to Emily herself. She could not venture to utter openly one word in opposition ; for Sir Philip Hastings had desired her not to do so, and she had given a promise to forbear ; but she thought it would be perfectly consistent with that promise, and perfectly fair and right, to show, in other ways than by words, that Mr. Marlow was not the man she would have chosen for her daughter's husband, and even to

insinuate objections which she dared not state distinctly.

In her manner to Marlow, therefore, Lady Hastings, though perfectly courteous and polite—for such was Sir Philip's pleasure—was as cold as ice, always added “sir,” to her replies, and never forgot herself so far as to call him by his name.

Emily remarked this demeanour ; but she knew (I should rather have said she was aware, for it was a matter more of sensation than thought—a conviction that had grown up in her mind without reflections), he was aware that her mother was somewhat capricious in her friendships. She had seen it in the case of servants, and of some of the governesses whom she had had when she was quite young. One day they would be all that was estimable and charming in Lady Hastings's eyes ; and another, from some slight offence—some point of demeanour which she did not like—or some moody turn of her own mind, they would be all that was detestable. It had often been the same, too, with per-

sons of a higher station ; and, therefore, it did not in the least surprise Emily to find that Mr. Marlow, who had been ever received by Lady Hastings before as a familiar friend, should now be treated almost as a stranger.

It grieved her, nevertheless ; and she thought that Marlow must feel her mother's conduct painfully. She endeavoured to make up for it by all the means in her power ; and thus the manners of Lady Hastings had an effect the direct reverse of that which she intended. Nor did her inuendos produce any better results ; for she soon saw that they grieved and offended her husband, while her daughter showed marvellous stupidity, as she thought, in not comprehending them.

Full of love—and now full of hope likewise—Marlow, it must be confessed, thought very little of Lady Hastings. He was one of those men upon whom love sits well (they are but few in the world) ; and whatever agitation he might feel at heart, none was apparent in his manner.

His attention to Emily was decided—pointed—not to be mistaken by any one well acquainted with such matters ; but he was quite calm and quiet about it : there was no flutter—no forgetfulness of proprieties : and his conversation had never seemed to Emily so agreeable as that night, although the poor girl knew not what was the additional charm. Delightful to her, however, it was ; and, in enjoying it, she forgot altogether that she had been sent for about business.

Thus passed the evening ; and, when the usual time for retiring came, Emily was a little surprised that there was no announcement of Mr. Marlow's horse, or Mr. Marlow's carriage, as had ever been the case before ; and to find that Mr. Marlow was going to spend some days at the Hall.

When Lady Hastings rose to go to rest, and her daughter rose with her, another thing struck Emily as strange. Sir Philip, as his wife passed him, addressed to her the single word, "Beware !" with a very

marked emphasis. Lady Hastings merely bowed her head in reply ; but when she and Emily arrived at her dressing-room, where the daughter had generally stayed to spend a few minutes with her mother alone, Lady Hastings kissed her, and wished her good night, declaring that she felt much fatigued, and would ring for her maid at once.

Lady Hastings was a very good woman, and wished to obey her husband's injunctions to the letter ; but she doubted her own firmness, and would not trust herself with Emily alone.

Dear Emily lay awake for half an hour after she had sought her pillow, but not more ; then she fell into a sleep as soft and calm as that of childhood, and next morning rose as blooming as the flower of June.

Sir Philip was up when she went down stairs, and walking on the terrace with Marlow. Lady Hastings sent word that she would breakfast in her own room,

when she had obtained a few hours' rest, as she had not slept all night. Thus, Emily had to attend to the breakfast table in her mother's place ; but in those days the lady's functions at the morning meal were not so various and important as at present ; and the breakfast passed lightly and pleasantly.

Still there was no mention of the business which had caused Emily to be summoned so suddenly ; and, when breakfast was over, Sir Philip retired to his library, without asking Emily to follow ; merely saying, "You had better not disturb your mother, my dear child. If you take a walk, I will join you ere long."

For the first time, a doubt—a notion, for I must not call it a suspicion—came across the mind of Emily, that the business for which she had been sent might have something to do with Mr. Marlow. How her little heart beat ! She sat quite still for a minute or two ; for she did not know, if she rose, what would become of her.

At length, the voice of Marlow roused her from her gently-troubled reverie, as he said—

“Will you not come out to take a walk?”

She consented at once, and went away to prepare. Nor was she long; for in less than ten minutes she and Marlow were crossing the park towards the thicker trees, under which they had rambled once before. But it was Marlow who now took the lead, and on a path which he chose himself. I know not whether it was some memory of his walk with Mrs. Hazleton, or whether it was that instinct which leads love to seek shady places, or whether, like a skilful general, he had previously reconnoitred the ground; but something or other in his own breast induced him to deviate from the more direct track, which they had followed on their previous walk, and guide his fair companion across the short, dry turf, towards the thickest part of the wood, through which there penetrated,

winding in and out amongst the trees, a small path, just wide enough for two, bowered over head by crossing branches, and gaining sweet woodland scenes of light and shade at every step, as the eye dived into the deep green stillness between the large old trunks carefully freed from underwood, and with their feet carpeted with moss, and flowers, and fern. It was called the deer's walk, from the fact that along it, morning and evening, all the bucks and does which had herded themselves on that side of the park, might be seen walking at a stately pace down that little path, to or from a running trout-stream, that wandered along about a quarter of a mile further on ; and often, in the hot weather, a person standing half way down the walk, might see a tall, antlered fellow standing with his fore feet in the water, and his hind quarters raised upon the bank, gazing at himself in the liquid mirror below, with all his graceful beauties displayed to the

uttermost by a burst of yellow light, which, towards noon, always poured upon the stream at that place.

Marlow and Emily, however, were quite alone upon the walk—not even a hind or hart was there ; and, after the first two or three steps, Marlow asked his fair companion to take his arm. She did so, readily ; for she needed it—not so much because the long gnarled roots of trees crossed the path from time to time, and offered slight impediments, for usually her foot was light as air ; but because she felt an unaccountable languor upon her—a tremulous, agitated sort of unknown happiness, unlike anything else she had ever before experienced.

Marlow drew her little hand through his arm, and she rested upon it, not with the light touch of a mere acquaintance, but with a gentle, confiding pressure which was very pleasant to him ; and yet the capricious man must needs, every two or three minutes, change that kindly position,

as the trees and the irregularities of the walk afforded an excuse. Now he placed Emily on the one side, now on the other; and, if she had thought at all—but by this time she was far past thought—she might have fancied that he did so solely for the purpose of once more taking her hand in his, to draw it through his arm again.

At the spot where the walk struck the stream, and before it proceeded onward by the bank, there was a little irregular open space, not twenty yards broad in any direction, canopied over by the tall branches of an oak; and, beneath the shade, about twelve yards from the margin of the stream, was a pure, clear, shallow well of exceedingly cold water, which, as it quietly flowed over the brink, went on to join the rivulet below. The well was taken care of, kept clean, and basined by plain, flat stones; but there was no temple over it, Gothic or Greek. On the side farthest from the stream, was a plain wooden bench, placed

for the convenience of persons who came to drink the waters, which were supposed to have some salutary influence; and there, by tacit consent, Marlow and Emily seated themselves side by side.

They gazed into the clear little well at their feet, seeing all the round variegated pebbles at the bottom, glistening like jewels, as the branches above (moved by a fresh wind that was stirring in the sky) made the chequered light dance over the surface. There was a green leaf broken by some chance from a bough above, which floated about upon the water as the air fanned it gently, now hither, now thither, now gilded by the sunshine, now covered with dim shadow.

After pausing in silence, for a moment or two, Marlow pointed to the leaf with a light and seemingly careless smile, saying—

“See how it floats about, Emily. That leaf is like a young heart full of love.”

"Indeed!" said Emily, looking full into his face with a look of inquiry; for perhaps she thought that in his simile she might find an interpretation of what was going on in her own bosom—"Indeed! How so?"

"Do you not see," said Marlow, "how it is blown about by the softest breath, which stirs not the less sensitive things around; how it is carried by any passing air, now into bright, hopeful light, now into dim, melancholy shadow?"

"And is that like love?" asked Emily. "I should have thought that it was all brightness."

"Ay, happy love—love returned," replied Marlow; "but where there is uncertainty, or doubt, there hope and fear make, alternately, the light and shade of love, and the faintest breath will bear the heart from the one extreme to the other. I know it from the experience of the last three days, Emily; for, since last we met, I, too, have fluctuated between the light

and shade. Your father's consent has given a momentary gleam of hope ; but it is only you who can make the light permanent."

Emily shook, and her eyes were bent down upon the water ; but she remained silent so long, that Marlow became even more agitated than herself.

"I know not what I feel," she murmured, at length ; "it is very strange."

"But hear me, Emily," said Marlow, taking her unresisting hand. "I do not ask an immediate answer to my suit. If you regard me with any favour—if I am not perfectly indifferent to you—let me try to improve any kindly feelings in your heart towards me in the bright hope of winning you, at last, for my own—my wife. The uncertainty may be painful—*must* be painful ; but—"

"No, no," cried Emily, raising her eyes to his face, for an instant, with her cheek all glowing, "there must be no uncertainty. Do you think I would keep

you—you—in such a painful state as you have mentioned? Heaven forbid!”

“Then what am I to think?” asked Marlow, pressing closer to her side, and gliding his arm round her. “I am almost mad to dream of such happiness; and yet your tone, your look, my Emily, make me thus rash. Tell me, then—tell me, at once, am I to hope, or to despair? Will you be mine?”

“Of course!” she answered; “can you doubt it?”

“I can almost doubt my senses,” said Marlow.

But he had no occasion to doubt them.

They sat there for nearly half an hour; they then wandered on, with marvellous meanderings in their course, for more than an hour and a half more; and, when they returned, Emily knew more of love than ever could be learned from books. Marlow drew her feelings forth, and gave them definite form and consistence. He presented them to her by telling what he him-

self felt, in a plain and tangible shape, which required no long reverie—no deep fits of thoughtfulness—to investigate and comprehend. From the rich store of his own imagination, and the treasury of deep feelings in his breast, he poured forth illustrations that brightened, as if with sunshine, every sensation which had been dark and mysterious in her bosom before ; and, ere they turned their steps back towards the house, Emily believed—nay, she felt, and that is much more—that, without knowing it, she had loved him long.

CHAPTER VIII

THIS must be a chapter of rapid action, comprising, in its brief space, the events of many months—events which might not much interest the reader in minute detail, but which produced important results to all the persons concerned, and drew on the coming catastrophe.

The news that Mr. Marlow was about to be married to Emily, the beautiful heiress of Sir Philip Hastings, spread far and wide over the county ; and, if joy and satisfac-

tion reigned in the breasts of three persons in Emily's dwelling, discontent and annoyance were felt more and more strongly every hour by Lady Hastings. A duke, she thought, would not have been too high a match for her daughter, with all the large estates she was to inherit ; and the idea of her marrying a simple commoner, was in itself very bitter. She was not a woman to bear a disappointment gracefully ; and Emily soon had the pain of discovering that her engagement to Marlow was much disapproved by her mother. She consoled herself, however, by the full approbation of her father, who was somewhat more than satisfied.

Sir Philip, for his part, considering his daughter's youth, required that the marriage should be delayed at least two years ; and, in his theoretical way, he soon built up a scheme, which was not quite so successful as he could have wished. Marlow's character was, in most respects, one after his own heart ; but, as I have shown, he

thought there were weak points in it—or rather, points rendered weak by faults of education and much mingling with the world. He wanted, in short, some of that firmness—may I not say hardness?—of the old Roman, which Sir Philip so peculiarly admired; and the scheme now was, to re-educate Marlow, if I may use the term, during the next two years—to mould him, in short, after Sir Philip's own idea of perfection. How this succeeded or failed, we may have reason hereafter to show.

Tidings of Emily's engagement were communicated to Mrs. Hazleton, first by rumour, and immediately after by more certain information in a letter from Lady Hastings. I will not dwell upon the effect produced on her. I will not lift up the curtain with which she covered her own breast, and show all the dark and terrible war of passions within. For three days Mrs. Hazleton was really ill, remained shut up in her room, had the windows darkened, and admitted no one but her maid and the

physician ; and well for her was it, perhaps, that the bitter anguish she endured overpowered her corporeal strength, and forced seclusion upon her. During those three days she could not have concealed her feelings from all eyes, had she been forced to mingle with society ; but, in her sickness, she had time for thought—space to fight the battle in ; and she came forth triumphant.

When at length she appeared in her own drawing-room, no one could have imagined that the illness was of the heart. She was a little paler than before : there was a soft and pleasing languor about her carriage ; but—to all appearance—she was as calm and cheerful as ever.

Nevertheless, she thought it better to go to London for a short time. She did not dare to meet Emily Hastings. She feared *herself*.

Yet the letter of Lady Hastings was a treasure to her, for it gave her hopes of vengeance. In it, the mother showed, but

too strongly, her dislike of her daughter's choice ; and Mrs. Hazleton resolved to cultivate the friendship of Lady Hastings, whom she had always despised, and to use her weakness for her own purposes.

She was destined, moreover, to have other sources of consolation, and that more rapidly than she expected. It was shortly before her return to the country that the trial of Tom Cutter took place, and not long after she came back that he was executed. Many persons in the court at the trial, had remarked the effect which some parts of the defence had produced on Sir Philip Hastings. He was not skilful in concealing the emotions that he felt ; and, although it was sometimes difficult, from the peculiarities of his character, to discover what was their precise nature, they always left some trace by which it might be seen that he was greatly moved.

Information of the facts was given to Mrs. Hazleton by Shanks, the attorney, and by young John Ayliffe, who dwelt with plea-

sure upon the pain his successful artifice had inflicted. Mrs. Hazleton was well satisfied too.

But the wound went deeper than they thought. It was like that produced by the bite of a snake—insignificant in itself, but carrying poison into every vein.

Could his child deceive him? Sir Philip asked himself. Could Emily have long known this vulgar youth—gone secretly down to see him at a distant cottage—conferred with him unknown to either father or mother? It seemed monstrous to suppose such a thing; yet what could he believe? She had never mentioned John Ayliffe since her return from Mrs. Hazleton's; but it was certain, from Marlow's own account, that she had seen him there. Did not that show that she was desirous of concealing the acquaintance from her parents?

Sir Philip had asked her no questions, leaving her to speak if she thought fit. He was now sorry for it, and resolved to enquire, as the fact of her having seen

the young man, for whom he felt an inexplicable dislike, had been openly mentioned in a court of justice. But, as he rode home, he began to argue on the other side of the question. The man who had made the assertion was a notorious liar—a convicted felon. Besides, he knew him to be malicious; he had twice before thrown out insinuations which Sir Philip believed to be baseless, and could only be intended to produce uneasiness. Might not these last words of his be traced to the same motive? He would enquire in the first place, he thought, what was the connection between the convict and John Ayliffe; and, stopping on the way for that purpose, he soon satisfied himself that the two were boon companions.

When he reached his own dwelling, he found Emily seated by Marlow, in one of her brightest, happiest moods. Frank candour, graceful innocence, open-hearted truth, were in every look and every word.

It was impossible to doubt her ; and Sir Philip cast his suspicions from him—but, alas! not for ever. They would return from time to time to grieve and perplex him ; and he would often brood for hours over his daughter's character, puzzling himself more and more. Yet he would not say a word—he blamed himself for even thinking of the matter, and he would not show a suspicion. He nevertheless continued to think and to doubt, while poor unconscious Emily would have been ready, if asked, to solve the whole mystery in a moment. She had been silent from an unwillingness to begin a painful subject herself ; and, though she had not yielded assent to Mrs. Hazleton's arguments, they had made her doubt whether she ought to mention, unquestioned, John Ayliffe's proposal and conduct. She had made up her mind to tell all, if her father showed the slightest desire to know anything regarding her late visit ; but there was something in

the effects which that visit had produced on her mind, which she could not explain to herself.

Why did she love Mrs. Hazleton less? Why had she lost so greatly her esteem for her? What had that lady done or said which justified so thorough a change of feeling towards her? Emily could not tell. She could fix upon no word, no act, which she could entirely blame; but there had been a general tone in her whole demeanour which opened the poor girl's eyes too much. She puzzled herself sadly with her own ruminations, and probably could have fallen into more than one of her deep, self-absorbed reveries, had not sweet new feelings, and Marlow's frequent presence, kept her awake to a brighter, happier world of thought.

She was, indeed, very happy; and could she have seen her mother look brighter and smile upon her, she would have been perfectly so. Her father's occasional moodiness she did not heed; for he

often seemed gloomy merely from intense meditation. Emily had got a key to such dark reveries in her own heart, and she knew well that they were no true indications either of discontent or grief; for very often when, to the eyes of others, she seemed the most dull and melancholy, she was enjoying intense delight in the activity of her own mind. She judged her father from herself, and had not the slightest idea that any word, deed, or thought of hers, had given him the slightest uneasiness.

Notwithstanding the various contending feelings and passions which were struggling in the little circle on which our eyes are fixed, the course of life had gone on with tolerable smoothness, as far as Emily and Marlow were concerned, for about two months, when, one morning, Sir Philip Hastings received a letter in a hand which he did not know. It reached him at the breakfast table, and evidently affected him considerably. His daughter's eye instantly caught

the change of his countenance; but Sir Philip did not choose that any one should know he could be much moved by anything on earth; and he instantly repressed all agitation, quietly folded up the letter, concluded his breakfast, and then retired into his own study.

Emily was not deceived, however. There were moments in Sir Philip's life, when he was unable to conceal altogether the strong feelings of his heart under the veil of stoicism—or, as he would have called it, to curb and restrain them by the power of philosophy. Emily had seen such moments, and knew that, whatever were the emotions produced by that letter—whether of anger, or grief, or apprehension—her father was greatly moved.

In his own study, Sir Philip Hastings seated himself, spread the letter before him, and read it over attentively. But now it did not seem to affect him in the least. He was, in fact, ashamed of the feelings he had experienced, and partly shown.

“How completely,” he said to himself, “does a false and fictitious system of society render us the mere slaves of passion, infecting even those who tutor themselves from early years to resist its influence! Here an insolent young man lays claim to my name and my inheritance, and coolly assumes, not only that he has a title to do so, but that I know it; and this, instead of producing calm contempt, makes my heart beat and my blood boil, as if I were the veriest school-boy.”

The letter was all that Sir Philip stated; but it was something more. It was a very artful epistle, drawn up by the joint shrewdness of Mr. Shanks, Mr. John Ayliffe, and Mrs. Hazleton. It concisely stated the claims of the young man who signed it, to all the property of the late Sir John Hastings, and to the baronetcy. It made no parade of proofs, but assumed that those in the writer's possession were indisputable, and also that Sir Philip Hastings was well

aware that John Ayliffe was his eldest brother's legitimate son. The annuity which had been bought for himself and his mother was broadly stated to have been the purchase-money of her silence, negotiated by her father, who had no means to carry on a suit-at-law. As long as his mother lived, the writer said, he had been silent out of deference to her wishes ; but now that she was dead in France, he did not feel himself bound to abide by an arrangement which deprived him at once of fortune and station, and which had been entered into without his knowledge or consent. He then went on to call upon Sir Philip Hastings, in the coolest terms, to give up possession and acknowledge his right without, what the writer called, " the painful ceremony of a law-suit ;" and in two parts of the letter allusion was made to secret information which the writer had obtained by the kind confidence of a friend whom he would not name.

He probably intended to give point to this insinuation at an after period. It was aimed at poor Emily, but it fell harmless for the time, as no one knew better than Sir Philip, that she had never been informed of anything which would affect the case in question.

Indeed, the subject of the annuity was one which he had never spoken of to any person, since the transaction had been completed many years before ; and the name of John Ayliffe had never passed his lips till Marlow mentioned having seen that young man at Mrs. Hazleton's house.

When he had read the letter, and as soon as he thought he had mastered the last struggle of passion, he dipped his pen in ink, and wrote the few following words :—

“Sir Philip Hastings has received the letter signed ‘John Ayliffe Hastings.’ He knows no person of that name, but has

heard of a young man of the name of John Ayliffe. If that person thinks that he has any just claim upon Sir Philip Hastings or his estates, he had better pursue it in the legal and ordinary course, as Sir Philip Hastings begs to decline all private communication with him."

He addressed the letter to "Mr. John Ayliffe," and sent it to the post. This being done, he rejoined Marlow and Emily, and, to all appearance, was more cheerful and conversable than he had been for many a previous day. Perhaps it cost him an effort to be cheerful at all, and the effort went a little beyond its mark. Emily was not altogether satisfied; but Lady Hastings, when she came down, which, as usual, was rather late in the day, remarked how gay her husband was.

Sir Philip said nothing to any one at the time regarding the contents of the letter he had received. He did not even consult

a lawyer, and tried to treat the subject with contemptuous forgetfulness ; but his was a brooding and tenacious mind ; and he often thought, against his own will, of the epistle and the menaces it implied. Nor was he, or any one connected with him, to remain long unattentive or ignorant of the matter ; for in a few weeks the first steps were taken in a suit against him ; and, spreading from attorney's offices in every direction, the news of such proceedings travelled far and wide, till the great Hastings case became the talk of the whole country round.

In the meantime, Sir Philip's reply was very speedily shown to Mrs. Hazleton ; and that lady triumphed a good deal. Sir Philip was now in the same position with John Ayliffe, she thought, that she had been in some time before with Mr. Marlow ; and already he began to show, in her opinion, a disposition to treat the case very differently in his own instance and in hers.

There, he had strongly supported private negotiation—here, he rejected it altogether; and she chose to forget that the circumstances, though broadly the same, were in detail very different.

“We shall see,” she said to herself, “we shall see, whether, when the proofs are brought forward, he will act with that rigid sense of justice which he assumed here.”

When the first processes had been issued, however, and common rumour justified a knowledge of the transaction without private information, Mrs. Hazleton set out at once to visit “poor dear Lady Hastings,” and condole with her on the probable loss of fortune. How pleasant it is to condole with friends on such occasions! What an accession of importance we get in our own eyes, especially if the poor people we comfort have been a little bit above us in the world!

But Mrs. Hazleton had higher objects in view: she wanted no accession of im-

portance. She was quite satisfied with her own position in society. She sought to see and prompt Lady Hastings—to sow dissension where she knew there must already be trouble ; and she found Sir Philip's wife just in the fit frame of mind for her own purpose. Sir Philip himself and Emily had ridden out together ; and, though Mrs. Hazleton would willingly have found an opportunity of giving Sir Philip a sly friendly kick, and of just reminding him of his doctrines, pronounced in the case between herself and Mr. Marlow, she was not sorry to have Lady Hastings alone for an hour or two. They remained long in conference, and I need not detail all that passed. Lady Hastings poured forth all her grief and indignation at Emily's engagement to Mr. Marlow ; and Mrs. Hazleton did nothing to diminish either. She agreed that it was a very unequal match ; that Emily, with her beauty and talents, and even with her mother's fortune alone, might well marry into the

highest family of the land. Nay, she said, should the match be broken off, she might still take her rank amongst the peeresses. She did not advise, indeed, actual resistance on the part of her friend—she feared Lady Hastings's discretion: but she insinuated that a mother and a wife, by unwavering and constant opposition, often obtained her own way even in very difficult circumstances.

From that hour, Mrs. Hazleton, was the best friend of Lady Hastings.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE are seasons in the life of man, as well as in the course of the year ; and well and happily have many poets painted them. But these seasons are subject to variations with different men, as with different years. The summer, for instance, of one man is all bright and calm—a lapse of tranquil sunshine, and soft airs, and gentle dews. With another, the same season passes in the thunder-storm

of passion—the tempests of war or ambition.

It was an autumn-like period during the next three or four months of the family of Sir Philip Hastings. For the first time, uncertainty and doubt fell upon the family generally. There had been differences of temper and of character; slight inconveniences; occasional sickness and anxiety—all those things which, in the usual course of events, diminish the sum of human happiness even to the most happy. But there had been nothing the least like uncertainty of position; no wavering distrust, from day to day, as to what the morrow was to bring forth; no drop of that poison-chalice in which the keenest shafts of Fate are dipped—"the looking for of evil."

Now, every day brought some new intelligence, and some new expectation, and the mass was altogether unfavourable. Had the blow fallen at once—had any one been in power to say, "Sir Philip Hastings,

you must resign all your paternal estates, and pay back at once the rents for nearly twenty years—you must give up the rank and station which you have hitherto held, and occupy a totally different position in society—” Sir Philip Hastings would have submitted at once, and with less discomfort than most of my readers can imagine. But it was the wearing, irritating, exciting, yet stupifying progress of a law-suit which had a painful and distressing effect upon his mind. One day he thought he saw the case quite clearly ; could trace the tricks of his adversary, and expose the insecure foundation of his claim ; and then would come two or three days of doubt and discussion ; and then disappointment ; and a new turn, where everything had to begin again. But gradually proofs swelled up ; first giving some show of justice to the pretence that John Aycliffe had a claim : then amounting to a probability in his favour : then seeming, to unlearned eyes, very powerful as to his right.

I am no lawyer, and therefore cannot pursue all the stages of the proceeding ; but John Aycliffe had for his assistance unscrupulous men, whose only aims were to succeed, and to shield themselves from danger in case of detection ; and their turns, and twists, and new points, were manifold.

Sir Philip Hastings was tortured. It affected his spirits and his temper. He became more gloomy—occasionally irritable—often suspicious. He learned to pore over law papers, to seek out flaws and errors, to look for anything that might convey a double meaning, to track the tortuous and narrow paths by which that power which bears the name of Justice reaches the clear light of truth or falls into the thorny deep of error.

All this disturbed and changed him ; and these daily anxieties and discomforts affected his family too ; Emily, indeed, but little, except inasmuch as she was grieved to see her father grieve. But Lady Hast-

ings was not only pained and mortified herself : she contrived to communicate a share of all she felt to others. She became sad—somewhat sullen—and fancied all the time, while she was distressing her husband's spirits, and aggravating all he felt, by despondency and murmurs, instead of cheering and supporting him by making light of the threatened evils, that she was but participating sympathetically in his anxieties, and feeling her due share of his sorrows. She had no idea of the duty of cheerfulness in a wife, and how often it may prove the very blessing that God intended in giving man a help-mate.

Sickness, it is true, had diminished somewhat of the light spirits of her youth; but she had assuredly become a creature of repinings—a murmurer by habit—fit to double, rather than divide, any load of misfortune which Fate might cast upon a husband's shoulders.

Lady Hastings rather strove to look sad;
Emily Hastings, to be gay and cheerful ;

and both did it, perhaps, a little too much for the mood and circumstances in which Sir Philip then was. He wondered, when he came home after an anxious day, that Lady Hastings did nothing to cheer him—that every word was gloomy and sad—that she seemed far more affected at the thought of loss of fortune and station than himself. He wondered, also, that Emily could be so light and playful—so joyous and seemingly unconcerned—when he was suffering such anxiety.

Poor Emily! she was forcing spirits in vain, and playing the kindest of hypocrites—fashioning every word and every look to win him away from painful thought, only to be misunderstood.

But the misunderstanding was heightened and pointed by the hand of malice. The emotion which Sir Philip had displayed in the court, had not been forgotten by some whom a spirit of revenge rendered keen and clear-sighted.

It seemed impossible to mingle Emily's

name, directly, with the law proceedings which were taking place ; but more than once, in accidental correspondence, it was insinuated that secret information, which had led to the development of John Ayliffe's claim, had been obtained from some near relation of Sir Philip Hastings; and it became generally rumoured, and credited in the county, that Emily had indiscreetly betrayed some secrets of her father's. Of course these rumours did not reach *her* ears; but they reached Sir Philip Hastings; and he thought it strange, and more than strange, that Emily had never mentioned to him her several interviews with John Ayliffe, which, he had by this time learned, were more than one.

Some strange feeling, disguised doubtless by one of those veils which vanity or selfishness are ever ready to cast over the naked emotions of the human heart, withheld him from speaking to his child on the subject which caused him so much pain. Doubtless it was pride—for pride of a

peculiar kind was at the bottom of many of his actions. He would not condescend to enquire, he thought, into that which she did not choose to explain herself ; and he went on, in reality barring the way against confidence, when, in truth, nothing would have given Emily more relief than to open her whole heart to her father.

With Marlow, Sir Philip Hastings was more free, and more communicative than with any one else. The young man's clear perceptions, and rapid comprehension of any point in the course of the proceedings; his zeal, his anxiety, his thoughtfulness, and his keen sense of what was just and equitable, raised him every day higher in the opinion of Sir Philip Hastings; and the baronet would consult with him for hours, talk the whole matter over in all its bearings, and leave him to solve various questions of conscience in which he found it difficult himself to come to a decision. Only on one point, Sir Philip Hastings never spoke to him ; and that was Emily's conduct with regard

to John Ayliffe. That, the father could not do ; and yet more than once he longed to do it.

One day, however, towards the end of six months after the first processes had issued, Sir Philip Hastings, in one of his morning's consultations with Marlow, recapitulated succinctly all the proofs which John Ayliffe had brought forward to establish a valid marriage between his mother and the elder brother of the baronet.

"The case is very nearly complete," said Sir Philip. "But two or three links in the chain of evidence are wanting; and, as soon as I become myself convinced that this young man is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the legitimate son of my brother John, my course will soon be taken. It behoves us, in the first instance, Marlow, to consider how this may affect you. You have sought the hand of a rich man's daughter, and now I shall be a poor man; for although considerable sums have accumulated since my father's death, they will

not more than suffice to pay off the money due to this young man if his claim be established, and the expenses of this suit must be saved by hard economy. The property of Lady Hastings will still descend to our child; but neither she nor I have the power to alienate even a part of it for our daughter's dowry. It is right, therefore, Marlow, that you should be set free from all engagements."

"When I first asked your daughter's hand, Sir Philip," replied Marlow, "I heartily wished that our fortunes were more equal. Fate has granted that wish, apparently in making them so; and, believe me, I rejoice rather than regret that it is so, as far as I myself am concerned. We shall have enough for comfort, Sir Philip, and not too much for happiness. What need we more? But I cannot help thinking," he continued, "that this suit may turn out differently from what you expect. I believe the mind has its instincts, which, though dangerous to trust to, guide

us nevertheless, sometimes, more surely than reason. There is an impression on my mind, which all the evidence hitherto brought forward has been unable to efface, that this claim of John Ayliffe is utterly without foundation—that it is, in fact, a trumped-up case, supported by proofs which will fall to pieces under close examination.”

Sir Philip Hastings shook his head.

“But one thing more,” he said, “and I myself am convinced. I will not struggle against conviction, Marlow ; but the moment I feel morally sure that I am defending a bad cause, that instant I will yield, be the sacrifice what it may. Nothing on earth,” he continued, in a stern, abstracted tone, “shall ever prevent my doing that which I believe to be right, and which justice and honour require me to do. Life itself, and all that makes life dear, were but a poor sacrifice in the eyes of an honest man ; what then are a few thousand acres, and an empty designation ?”

"But, my dear Sir Philip," observed Marlow, "let us suppose for one moment that this claim is a fictitious one, and that it is supported by fraud and forgery ; you will allow that more than a few months are required to investigate all the particulars thoroughly, and to detect the knavery which may have been committed."

"My dear Marlow," returned Sir Philip, "conviction comes to each mind according as it is naturally constituted or habitually regulated. I trust I have studied the nature of evidence well—well enough to be satisfied with much less than mere law will require. In regard to all questions which come under the decision of the law, there are in fact two juries who decide upon the merits of the evidence ; one, selected from our fellow men—the other, in the bosom of the parties themselves, before which each man should scrupulously try the justice of his own cause ; and if the verdict be against him, he should look upon himself but as an officer to carry the sentence into execution.

I will never act against conviction. I will always act with it. My mind will try the cause itself; and the moment its decision is pronounced, that instant I will act upon it."

Marlow knew that it was in vain to argue further, and could only trust that something would occur speedily to restore Sir Philip's confidence in his own rights.

Sir Philip was now absent very frequently from home. The unpleasant business in which he was engaged, called him continually to the county town; and many a long and happy hour might Marlow and Emily have passed together, had not Lady Hastings at this time assumed a somewhat new character, though it was, in fact, merely a phase of the old one. She became—as far as health and indolence would admit—the most prudent and careful mother in the world. She insinuated that it was highly improper for Emily to walk or ride alone with her acknowledged lover, and broadly asserted

that their previous rambles had been permitted without her knowledge, and from inadvertence. During all Marlow's afternoon visits, she took especial care to sit with him and Emily the whole time, and thus sought to deprive them of all means of free and unconstrained communication. Such would have been the result, indeed, had it not been for a few morning hours, snatched now and then. Partly from a habit of indulgence, and partly from very delicate health, Lady Hastings was rarely, if ever, down to breakfast, and generally remained in her dressing-room till noon was past.

The hours of Sir Philip's absence were generally tedious enough to himself. Sometimes a day of weary and laborious business occupied the time ; but that was a relief, rather than otherwise. In general, the day was spent in a visit to the office of his lawyer—in finding the information he wanted—or, when the case he had desired to be prepared was not ready for him, in wait-

ing for it, hour after hour, in tedious, gloomy meditation, and very often riding home without it, reflecting on the evils of a dilatory system, which often, by the refusal of *speedy* justice, renders ultimate justice unavailable for anything but the assertion of an abstract principle. He got tired of this mode of proceeding : he felt that it irritated and disordered him ; and, after a while, whenever he found that he should be detained in suspense, he mounted his horse again and rode away, to amuse his mind with other things.

The house of Mrs. Hazleton being so near, he more than once paid her a visit during such intervals. His coming thus often was not altogether convenient to her ; for John Ayliffe was not an unfrequent visitor at her house, and Mrs. Hazleton had to give the young man a hint to let her see him early in the morning or late in the evening. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hazleton was not at all displeased to cul-

tivate the friendship of Sir Philip Hastings. She had her objects, her purposes, to serve ; and when she put on her most friendly looks towards the baronet, she was not moved merely by that every-day, instinctive hypocrisy, which leads man to cover the passions he is conscious of with a veil of the most opposite appearances,—but it was a scheming hypocrisy, having in view distant objects seen by herself, though inscrutable to others.

Thus, and for these reasons, she received Sir Philip Hastings, on all occasions, with the highest distinction, and assumed, with a certain chameleon quality which some persons have, the colour and tone of his mind to a considerable degree, while yet the general features of her own character were preserved sufficiently to shield her from the charge of affectation. She was easy, graceful, dignified as ever, with a certain languid air and serious quietness which was very engaging. She never referred, in her

conversations with Sir Philip, to the suit that was going on against him ; and, when he spoke of it himself, though she assumed considerable interest, and seemed to have a personal feeling in the matter—exclaiming, “ If this goes on, nobody’s estate will be secure soon ! ”—she suffered the subject to drop, and did not recur to it.

One day, subsequent to the conversation between Sir Philip and Marlow, part of which has already been detailed, Sir Philip turned his horse’s head towards Mrs. Hazleton’s at a rather earlier hour than usual. It was just half-past ten when he dismounted at her door ; but he knew her natural habits, and did not expect to find her occupied. The servant, however, instead of showing him into the small room where she usually sat, took him to the great drawing-room ; and, as he went, Sir Philip heard the voices of Mrs. Hazleton and another person in quick and apparently eager conversation.

There was nothing extraordinary in this, however; and he turned to the window and gazed out into the park. He heard the servant go into the morning-room, and then immediately all sound of voices ceased. Shortly after, a horse's feet, beating the ground rapidly, caught the baronet's ear; but the rider must have mounted in the court-yard and taken the back way out of the park, for he came not within Sir Philip's sight. A moment or two after, Mrs. Hazleton appeared; and there was an air of eagerness and excitement about her which was not at all usual. She seated Sir Philip beside her, however, with one of her blindest looks; and then, laying her hand on his, said, in a kind and sisterly tone—

“Do tell me, Sir Philip—I am not apt to be curious, or meddle with other people's affairs; but in this I am deeply interested. A rumour has just reached me from Hartwell, that you have signified your intention

of abandoning your defence against this ridiculous claim upon your property. Do tell me if it is true?"

"Partly true, and partly false," replied Sir Philip, "as all rumours are. Who gave you the information?"

"Oh, some of the people from Hartwell," she rejoined, "who came over upon business."

"The tidings must have spread fast," observed Sir Philip. "I announced to my own legal advisers only this morning, and told them to announce to the opposite party, that, if they could satisfy me upon one particular point, I would not protract the suit, putting them to loss and inconvenience, and myself also."

"A noble and generous proceeding, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton, with an enthusiastic burst of admiration. "Ah, dear Emily! I can see *your* mediation in this."

Sir Philip started as if a knife had been

plunged into him; and, with profound internal satisfaction, Mrs. Hazleton saw the emotion she had produced.

"May I ask," he said, in a dry, cold tone, after he had recovered himself a little, "may I ask what my daughter can have to do with this affair?"

"Oh, really—in truth I don't know," said Mrs. Hazleton, stammering and hesitating. "I only thought—but I dare say it is all nonsense. Women are always the peace-makers, you know, Sir Philip; and, as Emily knew both parties well, it seemed natural she should mediate between them."

"Know *both* parties well?" muttered Sir Philip Hastings to himself, slowly and thoughtfully; but he only replied to Mrs. Hazleton, "No, my dear madam; Emily has had nothing to do with this. It has never formed a subject of conversation between us; and I trust that she has sufficient respect for me, and for herself, not to interfere, unasked, in my affairs."

The serpent had done its work ; the venom was busy in the veins of Sir Philip Hastings, corrupting the purest sources of the heart's feelings.

Mrs. Hazleton saw it, and triumphed.

CHAPTER X.

EMILY was as gay as a lark. The light of love and happiness was in her eyes ; the hue of health was upon her cheek ; and a new spirit of hope and joy seemed to pervade all her fair form. So Sir Philip Hastings found her on the terrace with Marlow when he returned from Hartwell. She was dressed in a riding-habit; and one word would have explained all this gaiety in her mood. Lady Hastings, never very consistent in her actions, had wished for

some one of those articles of personal decoration which ladies only can choose. She had felt too unwell to go for it herself ; and, although she had, not a fortnight before, expressed her strong disapprobation of her daughter and Mr. Marlow walking out alone even in the park, she had now sent them on horseback to procure what she wanted. They had enjoyed one of those glorious rides over the downs, which seem to pour into the heart fresh feelings of delight at every step, flooding the sense with images of beauty, and making the blood dance freely in the veins. It seemed, also, both to her and Marlow, that a part of the prohibition was removed, and that, though they might not, perhaps, be admitted to *walk* out together, Lady Hastings could hardly, for the future, forbid them to *ride*. Thus they had come back very well pleased, with light hearts within, and gay hopes fluttering round them,

Sir Philip Hastings, on the other hand, had passed a day of bitterness, and hard,

painful thought. On his first visit to the county town, he had, as I have shewn, been obliged once more to put off decision. Then came his conference with Mrs. Hazleton. Then he had returned to his lawyer's office, and found that the wanting evidence had been supplied by his opponents. All that he had demanded was there, and no apparent flaw in the case of his adversary. He had always announced his intention of withdrawing opposition if such proofs were afforded ; and he did so now with stern, rigid, and somewhat hasty determination—but not without bitterness and regret. His ride home, too, was troubled with dull and grievous thoughts, and his whole mind was out of tune, and unfit to harmonize with gaiety of any kind. He forgot that poor Emily could not see what had been passing in his bosom, could not know all that had occurred to disturb and annoy him ; and her light and cheerful spirits seemed an offence to him.

Sir Philip passed on after he had spoken to Marlow, and sought Lady Hastings in the room below, where she usually sat after she came down. Sir Philip, as I have shown, had not been nurtured in a tender school ; and he was not very apt, by general preparation, to soothe the communication of any bad tidings. Without any circumlocution, then, or preparatory remarks of any kind, he addressed his wife in the following words :—

“ This matter is decided, my dear Rachael. I am no longer Sir Philip Hastings ; and it is necessary that we should remove from this house, within a month, to your old home—The Court. It will be requisite, moreover, that we should look with some degree of accuracy into the state of our future income and our expenditure. With your property, and the estate which I inherit from my mother, which, being settled on the younger children, no one can take from me, we shall still have

more than enough for happiness ; but the style of our living must be altered. We shall have plenty of time to think of that, however, and to do what we have to do methodically."

Lady Hastings—or, as we should rather call her now, Mistress Hastings—seemed, at first, hardly to comprehend her husband's meaning ; and she exclaimed—

"You do not mean to say, Philip, that this horrible cause is decided?"

"As far as I am concerned, entirely," replied Sir Philip Hastings ; "I shall offer no farther defence."

Lady Hastings fell into a fit of hysterics ; and her husband, knowing that it was useless to argue with her in such circumstances, called her maid, and left her.

The dinner-party at the Hall that day was a dull one. Sir Philip was gloomy and reserved ; and the news which had spread over the house, as to the great loss of property which he had sustained, soon robbed his daughter of her cheerfulness.

Marlow, too, was very grave ; for he thought his friend had acted prematurely. Lady Hastings did not come down to dinner ; and, as soon as the meal was over, Emily retired to her mother's dressing-room, leaving Marlow and her father with their wine. Sir Philip avoided the subject of his late loss, however ; and, when Marlow himself alluded to it, replied very briefly.

"It is done," he said ; "and I will cast the matter entirely from my mind, Marlow. I will endeavour, as far as possible, to do in all circumstances what is right, whatever may be the anguish it may cost me. Having done what is right, my next effort shall be to crush everything like regret or repining. There is only one thing in life which could give me any permanent pain ; and that would be to have an unworthy child."

Marlow did not seem to remark the peculiar tone in which the last words were uttered ; and he rejoined—

“ There, at least, you are most happy, Sir Philip ; for surely Emily is a blessing which may well compensate for any misfortune.”

“ I trust so—I think so,” said Sir Philip, in a dry and hasty manner ; and then, changing the subject, he added—“ Call me merely Philip Hastings, my good friend. I say, with Lord Verulam, ‘ The Chancellor is gone ;’ I mean, I am no longer a baronet. That will not distress me, however ; and, as to the loss of fortune, I can bear it with the most perfect indifference.”

Mr. Hastings, in some degree, reckoned without his host, however ; he knew not all the petty annoyances that were in store for him. The costs he had to pay ; the back rents which were claimed ; the long and complicated accounts that were to be passed ; the eager struggle which was made to deprive him of many things, undoubtedly his own ; all these were matters of daily trouble and irritation during

the next six months. He had greatly miscalculated the whole amount of expenses, too. Having lived always considerably within his income, he had imagined that he had quite a sufficient amount in ready money to pay all demands that could be made upon him ; but such was far from being the case. Before all the debts were paid, and the accounts closed, he was obliged to raise money upon his life interest in his mother's property, and to remain dependent, as it were, upon his wife's income for his whole means. These daily annoyances had a much greater effect upon Mr. Hastings than any more serious misfortune could have had ; he became morose, impatient, gloomy. His mind brooded over all that had occurred, and all that was occurring. He took perverted views of many things, and adhered to them with an obstinacy that nothing could shake.

In the meantime, all the neighbours and

friends of the family endeavoured to show their sympathy and kindness by every means in their power. Even before the family quitted the Hall, the visitors were more numerous than they had ever been ; and this was some consolation to Mistress Hastings, though quite the reverse to her husband, who did not indeed appear very frequently amongst the guests, but remained in his own study as much as possible.

It was a very painful day for every one, and for Emily especially, when they passed the door of the old Hall for the last time, and took their way through the park towards The Court. The furniture, in great part, the books, the plate, had gone before ; the rooms looked vacant and desolate ; and, as Emily walked through them one by one, ere she went down to the carriage, there was certainly nothing very attractive in the aspect. But spots were there, associated with many dear memories—feel-

ings—fancies—thoughts—all the bright things of early, happy youth ; and it was very, very bitter for her to leave them all, and know that she was never to visit them again.

She might, and probably would, have fallen into one of her deep reveries, had she not struggled against it, knowing that both her father and mother would require comfort and consolation in the coming hours. She exerted herself, then, steadily and courageously, to bear up without a show of grief ; and she succeeded even too well to satisfy her father. He thought her somewhat light and frivolous, and judged it very strange that his daughter could quit her birth-place, and her early home, without apparently one regretful sigh. He himself sat stern, gloomy, and silent in the carriage, as it rolled away. Mistress Hastings leaned back, with her handkerchief over her eyes, weeping bitterly. Emily alone was calmly cheerful ;

and she maintained this demeanour all the way along till they reached The Court, and separated till dinner time. Then, however, she wept bitterly and long.

Before she descended to meet her parents at dinner, she did her best to efface all traces of her suffering during the last hour. She did not succeed completely; and when she entered the drawing-room, and spoke cheerfully to her father, he raised his eyes to her face, and detected at once the marks of recent tears on her swollen eyelids.

"She has been weeping," said Mr. Hastings to himself; "can I have been mistaken?"

A gleam of the truth shot through his mind, and comforted him much; but alas! it was soon to be lost again.

From feelings of delicacy, Marlow had absented himself that day; but on the following morning he was there early, and thenceforward became a daily visitor at The Court. He applied himself particularly to

cheer Emily's father, and often spent many hours with him, withdrawing his mind from all that was painful in his own situation, by leading it into those debates on abstract propositions of which he was so fond. But Marlow was not the only frequent visitor at The Court. Mrs. Hazleton was there two or three times in the week, and was all kindness, gentleness, and sympathy. She had tutored herself well; and she met Mr. Marlow, as Emily's affianced husband, with an ease which was marvellously well assumed. To Mistress Hastings she proved the greatest comfort, although it is not to be asserted that the counsels which she gave her, proved at all comfortable to the household; and yet Mrs. Hazleton never committed herself. Mistress Hastings could not have repeated a word uttered by her, which any one on earth could have found fault with. She had a mode of insinuating advice without speaking it—of eking out her words by looks

full of significance to the person who beheld them, but perfectly indescribable to others.

She was not satisfied, however, with being merely the friend and confidante of Mistress Hastings. She must win Emily's father also ; and she succeeded so well, that Mr. Hastings quite forgot all doubts, and suspicions, and causes of offence, and learned to look upon Mrs. Hazleton as a really kind and amiable person, and as consistent as could be expected of any woman.

Not one word, however, did Mrs. Hazleton say, in the hearing of Emily's father, which could tend, in any degree, to depreciate the character of Mr. Marlow, or be construed into a disapproval of the proposed marriage. She was a great deal too wise for that, knowing the disposition of Mr. Hastings sufficiently to see that she could effect no object, and only injure herself by such a course.

To Emily, she was all that was kind and delightful. She was completely the Mrs.

Hazleton of former days. Still, she was less successful with her than with her parents. Emily could never forget the visit to her house, and what had occurred ; and the feelings she entertained towards Mistress Hazleton, were always those of doubt. Her character was a riddle to Emily, as well it might be. There was nothing upon which she could definitely fix, as an indication of a bad heart, or duplicity of nature ; and yet she doubted ; nor did Marlow at all assist in clearing her mind ; for, although they often spoke of Mrs. Hazleton, and Marlow admitted all her bright and shining qualities, yet he became very taciturn when Emily entered more deeply into that lady's character. Marlow, likewise, had his doubts ; and, to say sooth, he was not at all well pleased to see Mrs. Hazleton so frequently with Mrs. Hastings. He did not well know what it was he feared ; yet there was a something which instinctively told him that his interest in Emily's family would not

find the most favourable advocate in Mrs. Hazleton.

Such was the state of things when, one evening at the house of Mr. Hastings, a small dinner-party was assembled, the first which had been given since his loss of property. The summer had returned, the weather was beautiful, the guests were cheerful and intellectual, and the dinner passed off happily enough. Several gentlemen and several ladies were present; and amongst the latter was Mrs. Hazleton.

Politics at that time ran high: the people were not altogether satisfied with the King whom they had themselves chosen; and several acts of intolerance had proved that promises made before the attainment of power are not always very strictly maintained when power has been reached. Mr. Hastings had never meddled in the strife of party. He had a thorough contempt for politics and politicians; but he did not at all object to argue

upon the general principles of government in an abstract manner, and very frequently startled his hearers by opinions, not only unconventional, and wide and far from any of the received notions of the day, but sometimes also very violent, and occasionally, at first sight, irreconcilable with each other.

On the present occasion the conversation after dinner took a political turn, and, straying away from their wine, the gentlemen walked out into the gardens which were still beautifully kept, and prolonged their discussion in the open air. The ladies, too—as all old pictures show they were fond of doing in those days—were walking amongst the flowers, not in groups, but scattered here and there. Marlow was naturally making his way to the side of Emily, who was tying up a shrub at no great distance from the door; but Mrs. Hazleton unkindly called him to her, to tell her the name of a flower which she did not know.

In the meantime, Mr. Hastings took his daughter by the arm, leaning gently upon her, and walking up and down the terrace, while he continued his discussion with a Northumberland gentleman, known in history as Sir John Fenwick.

"The case seems to be this," said Mr. Hastings, in reply to some question of the other—"all must depend upon the necessity. Violent means are bad as a remedy for anything but violent evils ; but the greatness of the evil will often justify any degree of vigour in the means. Will any one tell me that Brutus was not justified in stabbing Cæsar ? Will any one tell me that William Tell was not justified in all that he did against the tyrant of his country ? I will not pretend to justify the English regicides, not only because they condemned a man by a process unknown to our laws, and repugnant to all justice, but because they committed an act for which there was no absolute necessity. Where an absolute necessity is shown, indeed—where no other

means can be found of obtaining freedom, justice, and security—I see no reason why a king should not be put to death as well as any other man. Nay, more, he who does the deed with a full appreciation of its importance, a conscience clear of any private motives, and a reasoning sense of all the bearings of the act he commits, merits a monument, rather than a gibbet, though in these days he is sure to obtain the one and not the other.”

“Hush, hush! do not speak so loud, my dear sir,” ejaculated Sir John Fenwick. “Less than those words brought Sidney’s head to the block.”

“I am not afraid of mine,” replied Mr. Hastings, with a faint smile. “Mine are mere abstract notions in regard to such things—very little dangerous to any crowned heads; and, if they thought fit to put down such opinions, they would have to burn more than one half of all the books we have derived from ancient Rome.”

Sir John Fenwick would not pursue the

subject, however, and turned the conversation in another course. He thought, indeed, that it had gone far enough, especially when a young lady was present ; for he was one of those men who have no confidence in any woman's discretion, and he knew well—though he did not profit much by his knowledge—that things, very slight when taken abstractedly, may become very dangerous if forced into connection with events. Philip Hastings would have said what he did say before any ears in Europe, without the slightest fear ; but, as it proved, he had said too much for his own safety. No one, indeed, seemed to have noticed the very strong opinions he had expressed, except Sir John Fenwick himself ; and, shortly after, the party gathered together again, and the conversation became general and not very interesting.

CHAPTER XI.

MEN have lived and died in pursuit of two objects, the least worthy on which the high mind of man could ever fix, out of all the vain illusions that lead us forward through existence from youth to old age—namely, the philosopher's stone, and the elixir of life. Gold, gold, sordid gold—not competence, not independence, but wealth profuse, inexhaustible wealth—the hard food of Cræsus; strange that it should ever form the one great object of our im-

mortal spirit! But stranger still, that a being born to higher destinies should seek to pin itself down to this dull earth for ever—to dwell in a clay hut when a palace gates are open—to linger in a prison when freedom may be had—to out-live affections, friendships, hopes, and happiness—to remain desolate in a garden where every flower has withered. To seek the philosopher's stone—even could it be found—was a madness; but to desire the elixir of life was a deeper insanity.

There was once, however, in the world's history, a search—an eager search—for that which, at first sight, may seem nearly the same as the great elixir, but which was in reality very, very different.

We are told by the historians of America, that a tradition prevailed amongst the Indians of Puerto Rico, that in one of the islands on the coast there was a fountain, which possessed the marvellous power of restoring, to any one who bathed in its

waters, all the vigour and freshness of youth, and that some of the Spanish adventurers sought it anxiously, but sought in vain. Here, indeed, was an object worthy of desire—here, what the heart might well yearn for, and mourn to find impossible.

Oh, that fountain of youth ! what might it not give back ! The easy pliancy of limb : the light activity of body : the calm, sweet sleep : the power of enjoyment and acquisition : the freshness of the heart : brightness of the fancy : the brilliant dreams ; the glorious aspirations ; the bounty and the gentleness : the innocence : the love. We, who stand upon the shoal of memory, and look back in our faint dreams to the brighter land left far behind, may well long for that sweet fountain which would renew—not life—but youth.

Oh, youth—youth ! Give me but one year of youth again ! And it shall come. I see it there, beyond the skies, that foun-

tain of youth, in the land where all flowers are immortal!

It is very strange, however, that with some men, when youth is gone, its very memories die also. They so little recollect even the feelings of that brighter time, that they cannot comprehend them in others: the feelings become a mystery—a tale written in a tongue they have forgotten.

So it was with Philip Hastings, and so also with his wife. Neither seemed to comprehend the feelings of Marlow and Emily; but her father understood them least. He had consented to their union: he approved of his daughter's choice; yet it seemed strange and unpleasant to him, that her thoughts should be so completely given to her lover. He would hardly believe that the intense affection she felt for another, was compatible with love towards her parent. He knew not, or seemed to have forgotten, that the ordinance to leave all and cleave unto her husband is written in woman's heart as plainly as in The Book.

Nevertheless, that which he felt was not the least like jealousy—although I have seen such a thing even in a parent towards a child. It was a part of the problem of Emily's character, which he was always trying to solve, without success.

"Here," he thought, "she has known this young man but a short time—no years—not very many months ; and yet it is clear, that in that short space she has learned to love him better than those to whom she is bound by every tie of long-enduring affection and tenderness."

Had he thought of comparing her conduct and feelings with those of his own youth, he would still have marvelled ; for he would have said,

"*I* had no tenderness shown me in my younger days ; I was not the companion, the friend, the idol, the peculiar loved one, of father or mother, so long as my elder brother lived. I loved her who really first loved me. From *my* parents I had met

small affection and but little kindness. It was, therefore, natural that I should fix my love elsewhere, as they had fixed theirs. But with my child, the case is very different."

Yet he loved Marlow well—was fond of his society—was pleased that he was to be his daughter's husband ; but even in his case, Mr. Hastings was surprised in a certain degree : for Marlow did not and could not conceal that he loved Emily's society better than her father's—that he would rather a great deal be with her than with Brutus himself, or Cato.

This desire on the part of Marlow to be ever by her side, was a great stumbling-block in the way of Mr. Hastings's schemes for re-educating Marlow, and giving that strength and vigour to his character, of which his future father-in-law had thought it susceptible. He made very little progress, and, perhaps, Marlow's society might even have had some influence upon him—

might have softened and mitigated his character—but that counteracting influences were continually at work.

All that had lately happened—the loss of fortune and of station—the dark and irritating suspicions which had been instilled into his mind in regard to his child's conduct—the doubts which had been produced of her frankness and candour—the fact before his eyes, that she loved another better, far better, than himself—and a kind word now and then from Mrs. Hazleton, spoken to drive the dart deeper into his heart, had rendered him morose and gloomy—apt to take a bad view of other people's actions, and to judge less fairly than he always wished to judge. When Marlow hastened away from him to rejoin Emily, and paint with her, in all the brightest colours of imagination, a picture of the glowing future, her father would walk solitarily and thoughtfully, giving himself up to dark and unprofitable reveries.

Mrs. Hastings, in the mean time, would take council with Mrs. Hazleton, and they would settle between them that the father was already dissatisfied with the engagement he had wished to bring about ; and that a little persevering opposition on the part of the mother would ultimately bring that engagement to an end.

Mrs. Hastings, too, thought—or rather, seemed to feel, for she did not reduce it to thought—that she had now a greater right to exercise some authority in regard to her daughter's marriage, as Emily's whole fortune must proceed from her own property. She ventured to oppose more boldly, and to express her opinion against the marriage, both to her husband and her child. It was contrary to the advice of Mrs. Hazleton that she did so ; for that lady knew Mr. Hastings far better than his own wife knew him ; and, while Emily's cheeks burned, and her eyes swam in tears, Mr. Hastings replied in so stern and bitter a tone that Mrs. Hastings shrunk back, alarmed at what she herself had done.

But the word had been spoken—the truth revealed. Both Mr. Hastings and Emily were thenceforth aware that she wished the engagement between her daughter and Marlow broken off. She was averse to the marriage, and would oppose it.

The effect of this full revelation of her views upon her child and her husband, was very different. Emily had coloured with surprise and grief—not, as her father thought, with anger ; and she resolved thenceforth to endeavour to soften her mother's feelings towards him she loved, and to win her consent to that upon which all her own happiness depended, but in which her happiness could not be complete without a mother's approbation.

Mr. Hastings, on the contrary, entertained no expectation that his wife would ever change her views, even if she changed her course. Some knowledge, some comprehension, of her character, had been

forced upon him during the many years of their union ; and he believed that, if all open remonstrance and declared opposition had been crushed by his sharp and resolute answer, there would, nevertheless, be continual or ever-recurring efforts, on the part of Mrs. Hastings, to have her own way, and thwart both his purposes and Emily's affection. He prepared to encounter that irritating guerrilla warfare of tart words, and sneers, and inuendoes, by which a wife sometimes endeavours to overcome a husband's resolutions ; and he hardened himself to resist. He knew that she would not conquer in the strife ; but he determined to put an end to the warfare, either by some decided expression of his anger at such proceedings, or by uniting Emily to Marlow much sooner than he had at first proposed.

The latter seemed the easier method ; and there was a great chance of the marriage—which it had been agreed

should be delayed till Emily was nineteen —taking place much earlier, when events occurred which produced even a longer delay.

One of the first measures adopted by Mr. Hastings to shew his wife that her unreasonable opposition would have no effect upon him, was, not only to remove the prohibition of those lovers' rambles which Mrs. Hastings had forbidden, but to send his daughter and her promised husband forth together on any pretext that presented itself. He took the opportunity of doing so first when his wife was present ; and, on the impulse of the moment, she ventured to object. One look, one word, from her husband, however, silenced her ; for they were a look and a word not to be trifled with ; and Emily went to dress for her walk, but she went with tears in her eyes. She was grieved to find that all that appertained to her happiness was likely to become a cause of dissension between her father and her mother. Had Marlow

not been concerned—had his happiness not been also at stake—she would have sacrificed everything to avoid such a result ; but she felt she had no right to yield to caprice where he was to suffer as well as herself.

The walk took place ; and it might have been very sweet to both, had not the scene which immediately proceeded it poured a drop of bitterness into their little cup of joy. Such walks were often renewed during the month that followed ; but Emily was not so happy as she might have been ; for she saw that her father assumed a sterner, colder tone towards his wife, and believed that she might be the unwilling cause of this painful alienation. She knew not that it proceeded partly from another source—that Mr. Hastings had discovered or divined that his wife had some feeling of increased power and authority, from the fact of his having lost his large estates, and of her property being all that remained to them both.

Poor Emily! Marlow's love—that dream of joy—seemed to produce, for a time at least, nothing but grief and anxiety. Her reveries became more frequent and more deep; and, though her lover could call her from them in a moment, no one else had the power.

One day, Marlow and Emily—for whom every day his love increased, for he knew and comprehended her perfectly, and he was the only one—had enjoyed a more happy and peaceful ramble than usual, through green lanes, and up the hill, and amidst the bright scenery which lay on the confines of the two counties; and they returned slowly towards the house, not anticipating much comfort there. As they approached, they saw from the road a carriage standing before the door, dusty, as if from a long journey, but with the horses still attached. Three men were with the carriage, besides the driver; and they were walking their horses up and down the

terrace, as if their stay was to be but short. It was an unusual number of attendants, even in those days, to accompany a carriage in the country, except upon some visit of great ceremony ; and the vehicle itself—a large old rumbling coach which had seen better days—gave no indication of any great state or dignity on the part of its owner.

Why, she knew not; but a feeling of fear, or at least anxiety, came over Emily as she gazed; and, turning to Marlow, she said,—

“ Who are these visitors ?”

“ I know not, indeed, dear love,” he answered ; “ but the equipage is somewhat strange. Were we in France,” he added, with a laugh, “ I should think it belonged to an ‘*Exempt*,’ bearing a *lettre de cachet*.”

Emily smiled also; for the idea of her father having incurred the anger of any government, or violated any law, seemed to be quite out of the question.

When they approached the door, however, they were met by a servant, with a grave and anxious countenance, who told them that Mr. Hastings wished to see them immediately in the dining-room.

"Is any one with him?" asked Emily, in some surprise.

"Yes, Mistress Emily," replied the man; "there is a strange gentleman with him. But you had better go in at once; for I am afraid things are not going well."

Marlow drew her arm through his, and pressed it gently to make her feel support; and then went into the eating-room, as it was usually called, by her side.

When they entered, they found the scene a strange and painful one. Mr. Hastings was seated near a window, with his hat on and his cloak cast down on a chair beside him. His wife was near him, weeping bitterly; and, at the large table in the middle of the room, was a coarse-looking man, in the garb of a gentleman, but with no other indication

of belonging to a superior class. He was very corpulent; and his face, shadowed by an enormous wig, was large and bloated. Food and wine were before him; and to both he seemed to be doing ample justice, without taking any notice of the master of the house or of his weeping lady.

Mr. Hasting, however, rose, and advanced towards his daughter as soon as she entered. In an instant, the eye of the gormandizing guest was raised from his plate and turned towards the party with a look of eager suspicion.

"Oh, my dear father, what is this?" exclaimed Emily, running towards him.

"One of those accidents of life, my child," replied Mr. Hastings, "from which I had hoped to be exempt—most foolishly. But it seems," he continued, "no conduct, however reserved, can shield one from the unjust suspicions of princes and governments."

"Very good cause for suspicion, sir,"

said the man at the table, quaffing a large glass of wine. "Mr. Secretary would not have signed a warrant without strong evidence. Vernon is a cautious man, sir—a very cautious man."

"And who is this person?" asked Marlow, pointing to the individual who spoke.

"A messenger of the powers that be," replied Mr. Hastings. "It seems that because Sir John Fenwick dined here a short time ago, and has since been accused of some practices against the State. His Majesty's advisers have thought fit to connect me with his doings or their own suspicions, though they might as well have sent down to arrest my butler or my footman; and I am now to have the benefit of a journey to the Tower of London under arrest."

"Or to Newgate," said the messenger, significantly.

"To London, at all events," rejoined Mr. Hastings.

"I will go with you," said Marlow, at

once ; but, before the prisoner could answer, the messenger interfered, saying—

“That I cannot allow !”

“I am afraid you must allow it,” replied Marlow, “whether it pleases you or not.”

“I will have no one in the carriage with my prisoner,” said the messenger, striking the table gently with the haft of his knife.

“That may be,” answered Marlow ; “but you will not, I presume, pretend to prevent my going where I please in my own carriage ; and, when once in London, I shall find no difficulty, in seeing Mr. Hastings, as I know Mr. Vernon well.”

The latter announcement made a great change in the messenger’s demeanour, and he became much more tame and docile from the moment it struck his ear.

Mr. Hastings, indeed, would fain have persuaded his young friend to remain where he was, and looked at Emily with some of that tenderer feeling of a parent, which so often prompts to every sacrifice for a child’s

sake. But Emily thanked Marlow eagerly for proposing to go ; and even Mrs. Hastings expressed some gratitude.

The arrangements were soon made. There being no time to send for Marlow's own carriage and horses, it was agreed that he should take a carriage belonging to Mr. Hastings, with his horses, for the first stage. The prisoner's valet was to accompany his friend, and immediate orders were given for the necessary preparations.

When all was ready, Emily asked some questions of her father in a low tone, to which he replied—

“ On no account, my child. I will send for you and your mother, should need be ; but do not stir before you hear from me. This is a mere cloud—a passing shower, which will soon be gone, and leave the sky as bright as ever. We do not live in an age when kings of England can play at football with the heads of innocent men ; and I, as you all know, am innocent.”

He then embraced his wife and child with more tenderness than he was wont to shew; and, entering the carriage first, was followed by the messenger. The other men mounted their horses; and Marlow did not linger behind the sad cavalcade.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP HASTINGS had calculated much upon his Roman firmness ; and he would have borne death or any great and sudden calamity with fortitude ; but small evils often affect us more than large ones. He knew not what it was to suffer long imprisonment ; to undergo the wearing, grinding process of life within a prison's walls. He knew not the effect of long suspense ; the fretful impatience for some turn in our fate ; the dull monotony of

continued expectation and protracted disappointment ; the slow creeping on of leaden despair, which craves nothing in the end but some change, be it for better or for worse.

They took him to Newgate—the prison of common felons ; and there, in a small room, strictly guarded, he remained more than two months. At first he would not send for any lawyer ; for he fancied there must either be some error on the part of the Government, or that the suspicion against him must be so slight as to be easily removeable. But day went by on day, and hour followed hour, without any appearance of a change in his fate. A great alteration took place, however, in his character. He became morose, gloomy, irritable. Every dark point in his own fate and history—every painful event which had occurred for many years—every doubt or suspicion which had spread anxiety through his mind,—was now mag-

nified a thousand-fold by long, brooding, solitary meditation. He pondered such things daily, hourly, in the broad day, and in the dead, still night, when want of exercise deprived him of sleep, till his brain seemed to turn, and his whole heart was filled with bitterness.

Marlow, who visited him every day, by permission of the Secretary of State, found him each day much changed, both in appearance and manner ; and even his visitor's conversation gave but little relief. He heard with small emotion the news of the day or of his own family. He read the letters of his wife and daughter coldly. He heard even the intelligence that Sir John Fenwick was condemned for high treason, and sentenced to die on the scaffold, without any appearance of interest. He remained self-involved and thoughtful.

At length, after a long interval—for the Government was undecided how to proceed in his and several other cases connected

with that famous conspiracy—a day was appointed for his first examination by the Secretary of State, matters being then conducted in a very different manner from that in which they are treated at present ; and he was carried under guard to Whitehall.

Vernon was a calm and not unamiable man ; and, treating the prisoner with unaffected gentleness, he told him that the Government was very anxious to avoid the effusion of any more blood, and expressed a hope that Mr. Hastings would afford such explanations of his conduct as would save the pain of proceeding against him. He did not wish, by any means, he said, to induce him to criminate himself ; but merely to give such explanations as he might think fit.

Philip Hastings replied, sternly, that, before he could give any explanations, he must learn what there was in his conduct to explain.

“It has ever been open, plain and

straightforward," he said. "I have taken no part in conspiracies, very little part in politics. I have nothing to fear from anything I myself can utter, for I have nothing to conceal. Tell me, what is the charge against me, and I will answer it boldly. Ask what questions you please, and I will reply at once to those to which I can find a reply in my own knowledge."

"I thought the nature of the charge had been made fully known to you," said Vernon; "however, it is soon stated. You are charged, Mr. Hastings, with having taken a most decided part in the criminal designs, if not in the criminal acts, of that unfortunate man, Sir John Fenwick—nay, of having first suggested to him the darkest of all his designs, namely, the assassination of His Majesty."

"*I* suggest the assassination of the King!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings; "*I* propose such an act! Sir, the charge is ridiculous. Has not the only share I ever took in politics been to aid in placing King

William upon the throne, and, consistently, to support his government since? What the ministers of the Crown can seek by bringing such a charge against me I know not; but it is evidently fictitious, and of course has an object."

Vernon's cheek grew red; and he replied, warmly—

"That is an over-bold assertion, sir, and I will soon satisfy you that it is unjust, and that the Crown has not acted without cause. Allow me, then, to tell you, that no sooner had the conspiracy of Sir John Fenwick been detected, and his apprehension been made known, than information was privately given—from your own part of the country—to the following effect." And he proceeded to read from a paper, which had evidently been folded in the form of a letter, the ensuing words:

'That, on the — day of May last, when walking in the gardens of his own house, called The Court,' he—'that is yourself, sir'—used the following language to Sir

John Fenwick : " When no other means can be found of obtaining justice, freedom, and security, I see no reason why a king should not be put to death as well as any other man. He who does the deed merits a monument rather than a gibbet.' " Such was the information, sir, on which Government first acted in causing your apprehension."

The Secretary paused; and for a few moments Mr. Hastings remained gazing down in silence, like a man utterly confounded. Vernon thought he had touched him home ; but the emotions in the prisoner's bosom, though very violent, were altogether different from those which the Secretary attributed to him. He remembered the conversation well; but he remembered also that the only one who, besides Sir John Fenwick, was with him at the moment, was his own child. I will not dwell upon his feelings; but they absorbed him entirely, till the Secretary went on, saying,

"Not satisfied with such slender information, Mr. Hastings, the Government caused that unhappy criminal, Sir John Fenwick, to be asked, after his fate was fixed, if he recollected your having used these words to him; and he replied, 'Something very like them.'"

"And I reply the same," returned Philip Hastings, sternly. "I *did* use those words, or words very like them. But, sir, they were in connection with others, which, had they been repeated likewise, would have taken all criminal application from them. May I be permitted to look at that letter in your hand, to see how much was really told, how much suppressed?"

"I have read all that is important to you," said Mr. Vernon; "but you may look at it if you please." And he handed it to him across the table.

Philip Hastings spread the latter out

before him, trembling violently, and then drew another from his pocket, and laid the two side by side. He ran his eye from one to the other for a moment or two, and then sank slowly down, fainting, upon the floor.

While a turnkey and one of the messengers raised him, and some efforts were made to bring him back to consciousness, Mr. Vernon walked round the table and looked at the two letters, which were still lying on it. He compared them eagerly, anxiously. The handwriting of the one was very similar to that of the other; and, in the beginning of that which Mr. Hastings had taken from his pocket, the Secretary found the words "My dear Father." It was signed "Emily Hastings;" and Vernon instantly comprehended the nature of the terrible emotion he had witnessed.

He was really, as I have said, a kind and humane man; and he felt very much

for the prisoner, who was speedily brought to himself again, and seated in a chair before the table.

"Perhaps, Mr. Hastings," said Vernon, "we had better not protract this conversation to-day. I will see you again to-morrow at this hour, if you would prefer that arrangement."

"Not at all, sir," answered the prisoner. "I will answer now ; for, though the body be weak, the spirit is strong. Remember, however, that I am not pleading for life. Life is valueless to me. The block and axe would be a relief. I am only pleading to prevent my character from being stained, and to frustrate this horrible design. I used the words imputed to me ; but, if I recollect rightly, with several qualifications, even in the sentence which has been extracted. Before that, however, many other words had passed, which entirely altered the whole bearing of the question. The conversation began about

the Regicides of the Great Rebellion ; and, although my father was of the party in arms against the King, I expressed my unqualified disapprobation of their conduct in putting their sovereign to death. I then approached, as a mere matter of abstract reasoning, in which, perhaps, I am too apt to indulge, the subject of man's right to resist, by any means, an unendurable tyranny. I quoted the examples of Brutus and William Tell ; and it was in the course of these abstract remarks, that I used the expressions which have been cited. I give you my word, however, and pledge my honour, that I entertained no thought, and had no cause whatever to believe, that Sir John Fenwick, who was dining with me as an old acquaintance, entertained hostile designs against the government of his native land."

"Your admitted opinions, Mr. Hastings," said Vernon, "seem to me to be very dangerous."

"That may be," returned the prisoner ;
"but, in this country, at least, sir, you
cannot kill a man for opinions."

"No ; but those opinions, expressed in
conversation with others who proceed to
acts," replied Vernon, "place a man in a
very dangerous position, Mr. Hastings. I
will not conceal from you that you are in
some peril ; but, at the same time, I am
inclined to think that the evidence, with-
out your admissions this day, might prove
insufficient, and it is not my intention to
take advantage of anything you have said.
I shall report to His Majesty accordingly ;
but the proceedings of the Government
will be guided by the opinion of the law
officers of the Crown, and not by mine.
I therefore can assure you of nothing ex-
cept my sincere grief at the situation in
which you are placed."

"I little heed the result of your re-
port, sir," said Mr. Hastings. "Life, I
say, is valueless to me ; and if I am

brought to trial for words very innocently spoken, I shall only make the same defence I have done this day, and I shall call no witnesses. The only witness of the whole," he added, with concentrated bitterness, "is probably on the side of the Crown."

Mr. Hastings was then removed to Newgate, leaving the two letters on the table behind him ; and, as soon as he was gone, Mr. Vernon sent a messenger to an inn near Charing Cross, to say he should be glad to speak, for a few moments, with Mr. Marlow. In about half an hour, Marlow was there, and was received by Vernon as an old acquaintance. The door was immediately closed, and Marlow seated himself near the table, turning his eyes away, however, as an honourable man, from the papers which lay on it.

"I have had an interview, Mr. Marlow, with your friend," said the Secretary ; "and the scene has been a very painful one. Mr. Hastings has been more af-

fectcd than I anticipated, and actually fainted."

Marlow's face expressed unutterable astonishment ; for the idea of Mr. Hastings fainting, under any apprehension whatever, could never enter into the mind of any one who knew him.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "what could be the cause of that? Not fear, I am sure."

"Something more painful than even fear, I think," responded Mr. Vernon. "Mr. Hastings has a daughter, I believe."

"Yes, sir, he has," replied Marlow, rather stiffly.

"Do you know her handwriting?" asked the Secretary.

"Yes, perfectly well," answered Marlow.

"Then be so good as to take up that letter next you," said Vernon, "and tell me if it is in her hand."

Marlow took up the paper, glanced at it, and at once said—

"Yes;" but the next instant he corrected himself, saying—"No, no ; it is very like Emily's hand—very, very like ; but more constrained."

"May not that proceed from an attempt to disguise her hand?" asked Vernon.

"Rather from an attempt on the part of some other to imitate it," rejoined Marlow. "But this is very strange, Mr. Vernon. May I read the letter through?"

"Certainly," replied the Secretary.

And Marlow read every word three or four times over with eager attention. The whole seemed to affect him very much ; for, notwithstanding the Secretary's presence, he started up, and paced the room for a minute or two in thought.

"I must unravel this dark mystery," he said, at length. "Mr. Vernon, strange things have taken place lately in the family

of Mr. Hastings ; things which have created in my mind a suspicion that some secret and external agency is at work to destroy his peace as well as to ruin his happiness, and, still more, I fear, to ruin the happiness of his daughter. This letter is but one link in a long chain of suspicious facts ; and I am resolved to sift the whole matter to the bottom. The time allowed me to do so must depend upon the course you determine to pursue towards Mr. Hastings. If you resolve to proceed against him, I must lose no time—although I think I need hardly say, there is small chance of your success upon such evidence as this.”

And he struck the letter with his fingers.

“ We have more evidence, such as it is,” replied Vernon ; “ and Mr. Hastings himself admits having used the words imputed to him.”

Marlow paused, thoughtfully, and then said—

“He may have used them—he is very likely to have used them; but it must have been quite abstractedly, and with no reference to any existing circumstance. I remember the occasion on which Sir John Fenwick dined with him, perfectly. I was there myself. Now, let me see if I can recall all the facts. Yes, I can, distinctly. During the whole of dinner—during the short time we sat after dinner—those words were never used; nor were conspiracies and treasons ever thought of. I remember, too, from a particular circumstance, that when we went out into the garden, Mr. Hastings took his daughter’s arm, and walked up and down the terrace with Sir John Fenwick at his side. That must have been the moment. But I need hardly point out to you, Mr. Vernon, that such was not a time which any man in his senses, and especially a shrewd, cunning, timid man, like Sir John Fenwick, would have chosen for the development of treasonable designs.”

"Were any other persons near?" asked Vernon. "The young lady might have been in the conspiracy as well as her father."

Marlow laughed.

"There were a dozen near," he answered. "They were subject to interruption at any moment—nay, they could not have gone on for three minutes; for that space of time did not elapse, after the gentlemen entered the garden where the ladies were, before I was at Emily's side; and not one word of this kind was spoken afterwards."

"Then what could have induced her to report those words to the Government?" asked Mr. Vernon.

"She never did so," replied Marlow, earnestly. "This is not her handwriting, though the imitation is very good. And now, sir," he continued, "if it be proper, will you explain to me what course you intend to pursue, that I may act accordingly?"

for, as I before said, I am resolved to search this mystery out into its darkest recesses; it has gone on too long already."

Vernon smiled.

"You are asking a good deal," he said; "but my views are so strong upon the subject, that I think I may venture to state them, even if the case against Mr. Hastings should be carried a step or two farther—which might be better, in order to ensure his not being troubled on an after occasion. I shall strongly advise that a *nolle prosequi* be entered; and I think I may add that my advice will be taken."

"You say I have asked much already, Mr. Vernon," observed Marlow; "but I am now going to ask more. Will you allow me to have this letter? I give you my word of honour that it shall only be used for the purposes of justice. You have known me from my boyhood, my dear sir; you can trust me."

"Perfectly, my young friend," replied Vernon; "but you must not take the letter to-day. In two days, the action of the Government will be determined; and, if it be such as I anticipate, you shall have the paper, which I trust, will lead to some discovery of the motives and circumstances of this strange transaction. Most mysterious it certainly is; for one can hardly suppose any but a fiend thus seeking to bring a father's life into peril."

"A fiend!" exclaimed Marlow. "She is much more like an angel, my dear sir."

"You seem to think so," said Vernon, smiling; "and, I trust, though love is blind, he may have left you clear-sighted in this instance."

"I am sure he has," answered Marlow; "and, as this young lady's fate is soon to be united to mine, it is very necessary that I should see clearly. I entertain no doubts, indeed; and I say boldly, that Emily never

wrote this letter. It will give me, however, a clue which, perhaps, may lead me to the end of the labyrinth, though, as yet, I hardly see my way. But a strong resolution often does much."

"Might it not be better for you," asked Vernon, "to express your doubts in regard to this letter to Mr. Hastings himself? He was terribly affected, as well he might be, when he saw this document, and believed it to be his own child's writing."

Marlow mused for some time ere he replied.

"I think not," he answered, at length. "He is a man of peculiar disposition; stern, somewhat gloomy, but honourable, upright, and candid. Now, what I am going to say, may make me appear as stern as himself; but, if he is suffering from doubts of that dear girl, knowing her as well as he does, he is suffering from his own fault, and deserves it. However,

my object is not to punish him, but thoroughly, completely, and for ever, to open his eyes, and to show him so strongly that he has done his child injustice, as to prevent his ever doing the like again. This can only be effected by bringing all the proofs upon him at once; and my task is now to gather them together. To my mere opinion regarding the handwriting, he would not give the slightest heed; but he will not shut his eyes to proofs. May I calculate upon having the letter in two days?"

"I believe you may," replied Vernon.

"Then when will Mr. Hastings be set free?" asked Marlow. "I should wish to have some start of him into the country."

"That will depend upon various circumstances," returned the Secretary. "I think we shall take some steps towards the trial before we enter the *nolle prosequi*. It is necessary to check, in some way, the ex-

pression of such very dangerous opinions as he entertains."

Marlow made no reply but by a smile ; and they soon after parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. HAZLETON was very consoling. She was with Mrs. Hastings two or three times in the week : and poor Mrs. Hastings required a considerable degree of consolation ; for the arrest of her husband, coming so closely upon the bitter mortification of pecuniary loss and abatement of dignity, and at the end of a long period of weak health, had made her seriously ill. She now kept her bed the whole day long, and lay, making

herself considerably worse by that fretful anxiety which was constitutional with her, as it is with many other people. Mrs. Hazleton's visits were a great comfort to her ; and yet, strange to say, Emily almost always found her more irritable after that lady had left her.

Poor Emily seemed to shine through the cloud of misfortune. Her character came out nobly in the midst of disasters. She was her mother's nurse and constant attendant. She kept her father informed of everything that passed. Not an opportunity was missed of sending him a letter ; and, although she would have made any sacrifice to be with him in prison, to comfort and support him in the peril and sorrow of his situation, she was well satisfied that he had not taken her, when she found the state into which her mother had fallen.

Often, after Mrs. Hazleton had sat for an hour or two with her sick friend, she would

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come down and walk upon the terrace for awhile with Emily, and comfort her much in the same way that she did Mrs. Hastings. She would tell her not to despond about her mother ; that though she was certainly very ill, and in a dangerous state, yet people had recovered who had been quite as ill as she was. Then she would talk about lungs, and nerves, and humours and all kinds of painful and mortal diseases, as if she had studied medicine all her life ; and she did it, too, with a quiet, dignified gravity, which made it the more impressive and alarming. Then again, she would turn to the situation of Mr. Hastings, and wonder what they would do with him. She would also bring every bit of news that she could collect regarding the case of Sir John Fenwick, especially when the intelligence was painful and disastrous ; but she hinted that, perhaps after all, they might not be able to prove anything against Mr. Hastings, and that even if they did—although the Government was inclined to

be very severe—they might, possibly, commute his sentence to transportation to the colonies, or imprisonment in the Tower for five or six years.

It is thus our friends often console us ; some of them, from a dark and gloomy turn of mind, and some from the satisfaction which many people feel in meddling with the miseries of others. But it was neither natural despondency of character, nor any general love of sorrowful scenes or thoughts, that moved Mrs. Hazleton in the present instance. She had a peculiar and especial pleasure in the wretchedness of the Hastings family, and particularly in that of Emily. The charming lady fancied that, if Marlow were free from his engagement to Emily the next day, and a suitor for her own hand, she would never think of marrying him. I am not quite sure of that fact—but that is no business of ours, dear reader ; and one thing is certain, that she would very wil-

lingly have sacrificed one half of her whole fortune—nay, more—to place an everlasting barrier between Emily and Marlow.

She was thus walking with her dear Emily, as she called her, one day, on that terrace at the back of the house where the memorable conversation had taken place between Mr. Hastings and Sir John Fenwick, and was treating Emily to a minute and particular account of the death of the latter, when Marlow suddenly arrived from London, and entered the house by the large glass doors in front. He found a servant in the hall, who informed him that Mrs. Hastings was still in bed, and that Miss Hastings was walking on the terrace with Mrs. Hazleton.

Marlow paused, and considered for a moment.

“Anything not dishonourable,” he said to himself, “is justifiable, in clearing up such a mystery.”

Passing quietly through the house into the dining-room, which had one window opening as a door upon the terrace, he saw his fair Emily and her companion pass along towards the other end of the walk, without being himself perceived. He then approached the window, and, calculating the distances nicely, so as to be sure that Mrs. Hazleton was fully as far off from himself as she could have been from Sir John Fenwick and Mrs. Hastings on the evening when they walked there together, he pronounced her name in an ordinary tone, somewhat lower than that which Mr. Hastings usually employed.

Mrs. Hazleton instantly started, and looked round towards the spot where Marlow was now emerging from the room.

The lady could not miss an occasion for saying something disagreeable ; and, the moment she saw him, she exclaimed—

“ Dear me, there is Mr. Marlow ! I am afraid he brings bad tidings, Emily.”

Emily paused not to consider ; but, with her own wild grace, ran forward, and cast herself into his arms. Fortunately, Mrs. Hazleton had no dagger with her. Her face was benevolent and smiling when she joined then ; for the joy that was upon Emily's countenance forbade any affectation of apprehension. It said, as plainly as possible,—“ All is well !” But she spoke the words too, stretching forth her hand to her supposed friend, and adding, “ Dear Mrs. Hazleton, Charles brings me word that my father is safe—that the Government have declared they will not prosecute.”

“ I congratulate you, with my whole heart, Emily,” replied the lady ; “ and I do sincerely hope that ministers may keep their word better in this instance than they have done in some others.”

“ There is not the slightest doubt of it, my dear madam,” said Marlow ; “ for I have the official announcement under the hand of the Secretary of State.”

"I must fly and tell my mother," said Emily.

And, without waiting for a reply, she darted away.

Mrs. Hazleton took a turn or two up and down the terrace with Marlow, considering whether it was at all possible for her to be of any further comfort to her friends at The Court. As she could not stay all night, however, so as to prevent Emily and Marlow from having any happy private conversation together, and as she judged that, in their present joy, they would a good deal forget conventional restraints, and give way to their lover-like feelings even in her presence, which would have been exceedingly disagreeable to her, she soon re-entered the house, and ordered her carriage. It must be acknowledged that both Emily and Marlow were well satisfied to see her depart; and it is not to be wondered at, if they gave themselves up for half an hour to the pleasure of meeting again.

At the end of that time, however, Marlow drew forth a letter from his pocket, carefully folded, so that a line or two only was apparent, and, placing it before Emily, inquired if she knew the hand.

"It is mine," said Emily, at first. But, the moment after, she exclaimed, "No, it is not! It is Mrs. Hazleton's—I know it by the peculiar way she forms the *g* and the *y*.—Stay, let me see, Marlow: she has not done so always; but that *g*, and that *y*, I am quite certain of. Why do you ask, Marlow?"

"For reasons of the utmost importance, dear Emily," he answered. "Have you any letters or notes of Mrs. Hazleton?"

"Yes, there is one which came yesterday," replied Emily; "it is lying on my table up stairs."

"Bring it, bring it, dearest girl," he said. "I wish very much to see it."

When he had got it, he examined it with a well-pleased smile, and then said, with a laugh,

"I must impound this, my love. I am now on the right track, and will not leave it till I have arrived at perfect certainty."

"You are very strange and mysterious to-day, Marlow," said Emily. "What does all this mean?"

"It means, my love," replied Marlow, "that I have very dark doubts and suspicions of Mrs. Hazleton; and all I have seen and heard to-day, confirms me. Now sit down here by me, dear Emily, and tell me if, to your knowledge, you have ever given Mrs. Hazleton cause of offence?"

"Never," answered Emily, firmly and at once. "Never in my life."

Marlow mused; and then, with his arms round her waist, he continued,

"Bethink yourself, my love. Within the course of the last two or three years, have you ever seen reason to believe that Mrs. Hazleton's affection for you is not so great as it appears? Has it ever wavered? Has it ever become doubtful to you, from

any stray word or accidental circumstance ?”

Emily was silent for a moment, and then replied, thoughtfully,

“ Perhaps I did think so once or twice, when I was staying at her house last year.”

“ Well then, now, dear Emily,” said Marlow, “ tell me everything, down to the most minute circumstance that occurred there.”

Emily hesitated.

“ Perhaps I ought not to do so,” she said. “ Mrs. Hazleton showed me, very strongly, that I ought not, except under an absolute necessity.”

“ That necessity has now arisen,” replied Marlow. “ Love cannot exist without confidence, Emily ; and I tell you, upon my honour and my faith, that *your* happiness, *my* happiness, and even your father’s safety, depend, in a great degree, upon your telling me all. Do you believe me, Emily ?”

"Fully," she answered, "and I *will* tell you all."

Thus seated by her lover's side, she poured forth the whole tale into his ears, even to the circumstances which had occurred in her own room when Mrs. Hazleton had entered it, walking in her sleep. The whole conduct of John Ayliffe—now calling himself Sir John Hastings—was also displayed; and the dark and treacherous schemes which had been going on, began gradually to evolve themselves to Marlow's mind. Obscure and indistinct they still were; but the gloomy shadow was apparent, and he could trace the outline, though he could not fill up the details.

"Base, treacherous woman!" he murmured to himself. Then, pressing Emily more closely to his heart, he thanked her again and again for her frankness. "I will never misuse it, my Emily," he said, "and no one shall know what you have told me, except your father. To him it must be absolutely revealed."

"I would have told him myself," said Emily, "if he had ever asked me any questions on the subject ; but, as he did not, and has lately seemed very gloomy, I thought it better to follow Mrs. Hazleton's advice."

"The worst and the basest she could have given you," said Marlow. "I have had doubts of her for a long time, Emily; but I have no doubts now ; and moreover, I firmly believe that the whole case of this John Ayliffe—his claim upon your father's estate and title—is all false and fictitious together ; supported by fraud, forgery, and crime. Have you preserved this young man's letter, or have you destroyed it, Emily ?"

"I kept it," she replied, "thinking that some time or other I might have to shew it to my father."

"Then one more mark of confidence, my love," pursued Marlow. "Let me have that letter. I do not wish to read it ; therefore you had better fold it up and

seal it ; but it may be necessary as a link in the chain of evidence which I wish to bring forward for your father's satisfaction."

"Read it, if you will, Marlow," she said. "I have told you the contents ; but it may be as well that you should see the words. I will bring it to you in a moment."

They read the letter over together; and, when Marlow had concluded, he laid his hand upon it, saying—

"This is Mrs. Hazleton's composition."

"I am almost inclined to fancy so myself," returned Emily.

"He is incapable of writing this," resumed her lover. "I have seen his letters on matters of business, and he cannot write a plain sentence to an end without making some gross mistake. This is Mrs. Hazleton's doing, and there is some dark design underneath it. Would to God that visit had never taken place!"

"There has been little happiness in the

house since," said Emily, "except what you and I have known together, Marlow ; and that has been sadly chequered by many a painful circumstance."

"The clouds are breaking, dear one," rejoined Marlow, rising. "But I will not pause one moment in my course till all this is made clear ; no, not even for the delight of sitting here by you, my love. I will go home at once, Emily, mount my horse, and ride over to Hartwell before it be dark."

"What is your object there ?" asked Emily.

"To unravel one part of this mystery," replied her lover. "I will ascertain, by some means, from whom, or in what way, this young man obtained sufficient money to commence and carry on a very expensive suit at law. That he had it not himself, I am certain. That his chances were not sufficiently good, when first he commenced, to induce any lawyer to take the risk, I am equally certain. He must have had it from some one; and my suspicions

point to Mrs. Hazleton. Her bankers are mine; and I will find means to know. So now farewell, my love. I will see you again early to-morrow."

He lingered yet for a moment or two, and then left her.

CHARTER XIV.

MARLOW was soon on horseback, and riding on to the county town. But he had remained longer with Emily than he imagined; and the day declined visibly as he rode away.

"The business hours are over," he thought; "bankers and lawyers will have abandoned the money-getting and mischief-making toils of the day; and I must stop at the inn till to-morrow."

He had been riding fast; but he now

drew in his rein, and suffered his horse to walk. The sun was setting gloriously; and the rich, rosy light, diffused through the air, gave everything an aspect of warmth and cheerfulness. But Marlow's heart was anything but gay. Whether it was that the scenes which he had passed through in London—his visits to a prison, his dealings with hard, official men, the toiling, moiling crowds that had surrounded him, the wearisome, eternal, yet ever-changing struggle of life, displayed in the streets and houses of a capital, the infinite varieties of selfishness, and folly, and vice, and crime—had depressed his spirits, or that his health had somewhat suffered, in consequence of anxious waiting for events in the foul air of the metropolis, I cannot tell. But certain it is, he was sadder than was usual with him. His was a spirit strong and active, naturally disposed to bright views and happy hopes, too firm to be easily depressed, too elastic to be long kept down. Yet, as he rode,

a sort of apprehension was upon his mind that oppressed him mightily.

He revolved all that had lately passed : he compared the state of Mr. Hastings's family, as it actually was, with what it had been when he first knew it; and there seemed to be a mystery in the change. Happiness and prosperity had then been with that household : a calm, grave, thoughtful, but contented father and husband : a bright, amiable, affectionate mother and wife : a daughter, to *his* mind the image of everything that was sweet, and gentle, and tender ; of everything that was gay, and sparkling, and cheerful ; full of light, and life, and fancy, and hope. Now, the father was in prison, deprived of the greatest share of his worldly prosperity, cast down from his station in society, gloomy, desponding, suspicious, and, as it seemed to him, hardly sane : the mother irritable, capricious, peevish, yielding to calamity, and lying on a bed of sickness ; while the bright angel of his love remained

to nurse, and tend, and soothe the one parent, with a heart torn and bleeding for the distress of the other. What had they done to merit all this? he asked himself. What fault; what crime, had they committed, to draw down such sorrows on their heads? None—none whatever. Their lives had been spent in kindly acts and good deeds; they had followed the precepts of the religion they professed; their lives had been spent in doing service to their fellow-creatures, and making all happy around them.

Then, again, on the other hand, he saw the coarse, and the low, and the base, and the licentious, prosperous and successful, rising on the ruins of the pure and the true; wily schemes, and villanous intrigues, obtaining every advantage, and honesty of purpose, and rectitude of action, frustrated and cast down.

Marlow was no unbeliever; he was not even inclined to scepticism; but his mind laboured, not without humility and reverence,

to see how it could reconcile such facts with the goodness and providence of God.

“ ‘ He makes the sun shine upon the just and the unjust,’ we are told,” said Marlow to himself ; “ but here the sun seems to shine upon the unjust alone ; and clouds and tempests hang about the just. It is very strange, and even discouraging ; and yet, all that we see of these unaccountable dispensations may teach us lessons for hereafter — may give us the grandest confirmations of the grandest truth. There must be another world, in which these disparities will be made equal : a world ‘ where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.’ We only see in part ; and the part that we do *not* see must be the part which will reconcile all the seeming contradiction between the justice and goodness of God, and the course of our mortal life.”

This train of thought he pursued till he reached the town, and put up his horse

at the inn. By that time it was quite dark, and he had tasted nothing since early in the morning. He therefore ordered supper; and the landlord, by whom he was now well known,—a good, honest, country landlord of the olden time—brought in the meal himself, and waited on his guest at table. It was so much the custom of gentlemen, in those days, to order wine whenever they stopped at an inn—it was looked upon as so much a matter of course that this should be done for the good of the house—that the landlord, without any direct commands to that effect, brought in a bottle of his very best old sherry (always a favourite wine with the English people, though now hardly to be got), and placed it by the side of his guest. Marlow was not by habit a drinker of much wine. He avoided, as far as in him lay, the deep potations then almost universal in England; but, not without an object, he that night gave in to a custom which was then, and for many years afterwards, very common

and requested the landlord, after the meal was over, to sit down and help him with his bottle.

"You'll need another bottle, if I once begin, Master Marlow," said the jolly landlord, who was a wag in his way.

Marlow nodded his head significantly, as if he were prepared for the infliction, replying quietly—

"Under the influence of your good chat, Mr. Blackadder Cherrydew, I can bear it, I think."

"Well, that's hearty," said the landlord, drawing a chair sideways to the table; for his vast rotundity prevented him from approaching it full front. "Here's to your very good health, sir; and may you never drink worse wine, sit in a colder room, or have a sadder companion."

Now, I have said that Marlow did not invite the landlord to join him without an object. That object was to obtain information; and it struck him, even while the trout, which formed the first dish at his

supper, was being placed on the table, that his host might be able, if willing, to afford it.

Landlords in England at that time—I mean, of course, in country towns—were very dissimilar in many respects, and of a different class, from what they are at present. In the first place, they were not fine gentlemen : in the next place, they were not generally discharged *valets-de-chambre*, or butlers, who, having cheated their masters handsomely, and perhaps laid them under contribution in many ways, retired to enjoy the fat things of life at their ease in their native town. Then again, they were on terms of familiar intercourse with two or three classes, completely separate and distinct from each other, and formed a sort of connecting link between them. At their door, the justice of the peace, the knight of the shire, the great man of the neighbourhood, dismounted from horseback, and chatted with mine host. There came the village lawyer, when he had gained a cause, or

won a large fee, or had been paid a long bill, to indulge in his pint of sherry, gossiping, as he drank it, of all the affairs of his clients. There sneaked in the doctor, to get his glass of *eau de vie*, or plague-water, or *agua mirabilis*, or, in short, strong spirits of any denomination, and to tell little dirty anecdotes of his cases and his patients. There the alderman, the wealthy shopkeeper, the small proprietor, or the large farmer, came to take a cheerful cup on Saturdays or on market-days. But besides these, the inn was the resort, though approached by another door, of a humbler and a poorer class, with whom the landlord was still upon as good terms as with the others. The waggoner, the carter, the lawyer's and the banker's clerk, the shopman, the porter even, all came there ; and it mattered not to Mr. Cherrydew, or his confraternity, whether it was a bowl of punch, a draught of ale, a glass of spirits, or a bottle of old wine, that his guests

demanded : he was civil, and familiar, and chatty with them all.

Thus, under the rosy and radiant face of Cherrydew, and in that good, fat round head, was probably accumulated a greater mass of information regarding the neighbourhood in which he lived, and all that went on therein, than in any other head in the whole town; and the only difficulty was to extract that part of the store which was wanted.

Marlow knew that it would not do to approach the principal subject of enquiry rashly ; for Mr. Cherrydew, like most of his craft, was somewhat cautious, and would have shut himself up in silent reserve, or enveloped himself in untangible ambiguities, if he had known that his guest had any distinct and important object in his questions ; as mine host had a notion that a landlord should be perfectly cosmopolitan in all his feelings and his actions, and should never commit himself in such a manner as to offend any one who was, had been, or

might be, his guest. He was fond of gossiping, it is true ; loved a joke, and was not at all blind to the ridiculous in the actions of his neighbours : but habitual cautiousness was in continual struggle with his merry, talking disposition; and he was generally considered a very safe man.

Marlow therefore began at a great distance, saying,

“ I have just come down from London, Mr. Cherrydew, and rode over, thinking that I should arrive in time to catch my lawyer in his office.”

“ That is all over now, sir, for the night,” replied the landlord. “ In this, two-legged foxes differ from others ; they go to their holes at sunset, just when other foxes go out to walk. They divide the world between them, Master Marlow. The one sort preys by day, the other by night.— Well, I should like to see Lunnun. It must be a grand place, sir, though somewhat of a bad one. What a number of executions I have read of there lately !

And then this Sir John Fenwick's business! Why, he changed horses here, going to dine with Sir Philip, as I shall call him to the end of my days. Ah, poor gentleman, he has been in great trouble. But I suppose, from what I hear, he'll get clear now."

"Beyond all doubt," said Marlow; "the Government have no case against him. But you say very truly, Mr. Cherrydew; there has been a sad number of executions in London; seven-and-twenty people hanged, at different times, while I was there."

"And the town no better," added Mr. Cherrydew.

"By the way," said Marlow, "were you not one of the jury at the trial of that fellow Tom Cutter? Fill your glass, Mr. Cherrydew."

"Thank you, sir. Yes, I was, to be sure," answered the landlord; "and I'll tell you the funniest thing in the world that hap-

pened the second day. Lord bless you, sir ! I was foreman ; and, on the first day, the Judge suffered the case to go on till his dinner was quite cold, and we were all half-starved ; but he saw that he could not hang him that night, at all events—(Here's to your health, sir)—so he adjourned the court, and called for a constable, and ordered all of us poor devils to be locked up tight in Jones's public-house till the next day ; for the jury-room is so small, that there is not standing room for more than three such as me. Well, the other men did not much like it, though I did not care ; for I had my boots full of ham, and a brandy-bottle in my breeches-pocket. One of them asked the Judge, for all his great black eyebrows, if he couldn't go on that night. But his lordship answered with a snort like a cart-horse, and told us to hold our tongues, and mind our business, and only to take care and keep ourselves together. Well, sir, we had to walk up the hill, you know,

and there was the constable following us, with his staff in his hand ; so I had compassion on my poor fellow-sufferers, and I whispered, first to one and then to another, that this sort of jog would never do, but I would manage to tell them how to have a good night's rest. ' You see,' says I, ' here's but one constable to thirteen people ; so when you get to the cross roads, let every man take up his legs and run, each his own way. He can but catch one, and the slowest runner will have the chance.' Now, I was the fattest of them all, you see ; so that every one of them thought I should be the man. Well, sir, they followed my advice ; but it's a different thing to give advice, and take it. No sooner did we get to the cross roads, than they scattered like a heap of dust in the wind ; some down the roads and lanes, some over the stiles and gates, some through the hedges—(little Sninkum, the tailor, stuck in the hedge, by the way, and man caught, for he was afraid of

his broad-cloth)—but I stood stock still, with a look of marvellous astonishment, crying out, ‘For God’s sake catch them, constable, or what will my lord say to you and me!’ Off the poor devil set in a moment,—one man to catch twelve, all over the face of the country. He thought he was sure enough of me ; but what did I do ? Why, as soon as he was gone, I waddled home to my own house, and got my wife to put me to bed up stairs, and pass me for my grandfather. Well, sir, that’s not the best of it yet. We were all in court next day at the right hour, and snug in the jury-box before the Judge came in ; but I have a notion he had heard something of the matter. He looked mighty hard at Sninkum, whose face was all scratched to pieces ; and, opening his mouth with a pop like the drawing of a cork, he said, ‘Why, man, you look as if you and your brethren had been fighting ;’ and then

he stared as hard at me, and roared, 'I hope, gentlemen, you have kept yourselves together.'

"Thereupon, I laid my two hands upon my stomach, sir—it weighs a hundred and a half, if it were cut off to-morrow, as I know to my cost who carry it—and I replied, quite respectful, 'I can't answer for the other gentlemen, my Lord; but I'll swear I've kept myself together.' You should have heard how the court rang with the people laughing, while I remained as grave as a judge, and much graver than the one who was there; for I thought he would have burst before he was done—and a fine mess that would have made."

Serious as his thoughts were, Marlow could not refrain from smiling; but he did not forget his object, and remarked—

"Efforts were made to save that scoundrel; and the present Sir John Hastings certainly did his best for his friend."

"Call him John Ayliffe, sir; call him

John Ayliffe," said the host. "Here's to you, sir!—He's never called anything else here."

"I wonder," said Marlow, musingly, "if there was any relationship between this Tom Cutter and John Ayliffe's mother."

"Not a pin's point of it, sir," replied the landlord. "They were just two bad fellows together—that was the connection between them, and nothing else."

"Well, John stood by his friend, at all events," said Marlow; "though where he got the money to pay the lawyers in that case, or in his suit against Sir Philip, is a marvel to me."

Mine host winked his eye knowingly, and gave a short laugh.

That, however, did not entirely suit Marlow's purpose; and he added, in a musing tone—

"I know that he wanted to borrow ten pounds two or three months before, but

was refused, because he had not repaid what he had borrowed from the same party previously."

"Ay, ay, sir," returned the landlord, "there are secrets in all things. He got money, and money enough, somehow, just about that time. He has not repaid it yet, either; but he has given a mortgage, I hear, for the amount; and if he don't mortgage his own carcass for it, too, before he has done I am very much mistaken."

"Mortgage his own carcass! I do not understand what you mean," replied Marlow. "I'm sure I would not give a shilling for that piece of earth!"

"A pretty widow-lady, not a hundred miles off, may think differently," said the landlord, grinning again, and filling his glass once more.

"Ah, ah!" said Marlow, trying to laugh likewise, "so you think *she* advanced the money, do you?"

"I am quite sure of it, sir," said Mr.

Cherrydew, nodding his head profoundly. "I did not witness the mortgage ; but I know one who did."

"What, Shanks's clerk, I suppose?" said Marlow.

"No, sir, no," replied the landlord. "Shanks did not draw the mortgage ; for he was lawyer to both parties, and Mrs. Hazleton did not like that.—Oh, she's 'cute enough!"

"I think you must be mistaken," said Marlow, in a decided tone ; "for Mrs. Hazleton assured me, when there was a question between herself and me, that she was not nearly as rich as she was supposed, and that if the law should award me back rents, it would ruin her."

"Gammon, sir!" ejaculated the landlord, who had now imbibed a sufficient quantity of wine, in addition to sundry potations during the day. "I should not have thought you a man to be so easily hooked, Mr. Marlow ; but if you will ask the clerk

of Doubledoo and Key, who was staying down here three or four days about the business, you'll find that she advanced every penny, and got a mortgage for upwards of five thousand pounds.—But I think we had better have that other bottle, sir."

"By all means," replied Marlow.

And Mr. Cherrydew rolled away to fetch it. When he returned, Marlow said—

"By the way, what was that clerk's name you mentioned?"

"Sims, sir, Sims," returned the landlord, drawing the cork. Then, setting down the bottle on the table, he added, with a look of great contempt, "He's the leetlest little man you ever saw, sir—not so tall as my girl Dolly, and with no more stomach than a currycomb: a sort of cross-breed between a monkey and a penknife. He's as full of fun as the one, and as sharp as the other. He'll hold a prodigious quantity of punch, though, small as he is.

I can't fancy where he puts it all; it must go into his shoes."

"Come, come, Mr. Cherrydew," said Marlow, laughing, "do not speak disrespectfully of thin people. I am not very fat myself."

"Lord bless you, sir, you are quite a personable man; and in time, with a few butts, you would be as fine a figure as I am."

Marlow devoutly hoped not; but he begged Mr. Cherrydew to sit down again, and do his best to help him through the wine he had brought, and out of that bottle came a great many things which Marlow wanted much more than the good sherry which it contained.

CHAPTER XV.

It was about ten o'clock in the day when Marlow returned to The Court, as it was called. The butler informed him that Miss Emily was not down—a very unusual thing with her, as she was exceedingly early in her habits; but he found, on enquiry, that she had sat up with her mother during the greater part of the night. Marlow looked at his watch; then at the gravelled space before the house where his own horse was being led up and

down by his groom, and a stranger, who had come with him, was sitting quietly on horseback, as if waiting for him.

"I fear," said Marlow, after a moment's musing, "I must disturb your young lady. Will you tell her maid to go up and inform her that I am here, and wish to speak with her immediately, as I have business which calls me to London without delay?"

The man retired, and Marlow entered what was then called the withdrawing-room, and walked up and down in thought. He had not remained many minutes, however, when Emily herself appeared, with her looks full of surprise and anxiety.

"What is the matter, Marlow?" said she. "Has any new evil happened?"

"Nay, nay, my love," rejoined Marlow, embracing her tenderly, "you must not let the few ills that have already befallen you, produce that apprehensiveness which long years of evil and mischance but too often engender. Brighter days are coming, I trust, my love. So far from new evils

having arisen, I have been very fortunate in my enquiries, and have got information which must lead to great results. I must pursue the clue that has been afforded me without a moment's delay or hesitation ; for should the thread be broken, I may have difficulty in uniting it again. But, if I judge rightly, my Emily, it will lead to the following results :—To the complete exposure of a base conspiracy ; to the punishment of the offenders ; to the restoration of your father's property, and of his rank."

He held her hand in his while he spoke, and gazed into her beautiful eyes ; but Emily did not seem very much overjoyed.

" For my own part, Marlow," she said, " I care little as to the loss of property or station ; and still less do I care to punish offenders. But I think my father and mother will be very glad of the tidings you give me. May I tell them what you say ?"

Marlow mused a moment or two. He was anxious to give any comfort to Mrs. Hastings, but yet he doubted her discretion ; and he replied, "Not the whole, dear Emily, except in case of urgent need. You may tell your mother that I think I have obtained information which will lead to the restoration of your father's property ; and you may assure her that no effort shall be wanting on my part to attain that object. Say that I am, even now, setting out for London for the purpose, and that I am full of good hopes. I believe I can prove," he added, after a moment's thought, and in reality more to lead Mrs. Hastings away from the right track, than from any other consideration, although the point he was about to state was a fact, "I believe I can prove that the missing leaf of the marriage register, which was supposed to be torn out by your grandfather's orders, was there not two years ago ; and that I can shew by

whose hands it was torn out at a much later date. Assure her, however, that I will do everything in my power, and bid her be of good hope."

"I do not understand the matter," returned Emily, "and never heard of this register; but I dare say my mother has, and will comprehend your meaning better than I do. I know the very hope will give her great pleasure."

"Remember one thing, however, dear Emily," continued Marlow. "On no account mention to her my suspicions of Mrs. Hazleton, nor show any suspicions of that good lady yourself. It is absolutely necessary that she should be kept in ignorance of our doubts, till those doubts become certainties. However, in case of any painful and unpleasant circumstances occurring while I am absent, I must leave these papers with you. They consist of the note sent you by Mrs. Hazleton, and which you shewed me—a paper which I feel confident is in her

hand-writing, but which imitates your hand remarkably, and which has led to wrong impressions—and the letter of young John Ayliffe—or, at least, that which he wrote under Mrs. Hazleton's dictation. I have added a few words of my own, on a separate sheet of paper, stating the impressions made on me in regard to all these matters, and which I will justify whenever it may be needful."

"But what am I to do with them?" asked Emily, simply.

"Keep them safely, and ever at hand, dear girl," replied Marlow, in a grave tone. "You will find your father, on his return, a good deal altered—moody, and dissatisfied. It will be as well for you to take no notice of such demeanour, unless he expresses plainly some cause of discontent. If he do so—if he should venture, upon any occasion, to reproach you, my Emily—"

"For what?" interrupted Emily, in utter surprise.

"It would be too long and too painful to explain all just now, dear one," answered her lover. "But such a thing may happen, my Emily. Deceived, and in error, he may reproach you for things you never dreamt of. He may also judge wrongly of your conduct, in not having told him of this young scoundrel's proposal to you. In either case, put that packet of papers in his hands, and tell him frankly and candidly everything."

"He is sometimes so reserved and grave," said Emily, "that I never like to speak to him on any subject to which he does not lead the way. I sometimes think he does not understand me, Marlow ; and I dread to open my whole heart to him, as I would fain do, lest he should mistake me still more."

"Let no dread stop you in this instance, my own dear girl," Marlow answered. "That there have been dark plots against you, Emily, I am certain. The only way

to meet and frustrate them, is to place full and entire confidence in your father. I do not ask you to speak to him on the subject, unless he speaks to you, till I have obtained the proofs which will make all as clear as daylight. Then everything must be told; and Sir Philip will find that, had he been more frank himself, he would have met with no want of candour in his daughter. Now, one more kiss, dear love, and then to my horse's back."

I will not pursue Marlow's journey across the fair face of merry England, nor tell the few adventures that befel him on the way, nor note the eager considerations that pressed, troop after troop, upon his mind; neither will I dwell long upon his proceedings in London, which occupied but one brief day. He went to the house of his banker, sought out the little clerk of Messrs. Doubledoo and Key, and contrived from both to obtain proof positive that Mrs. Hazleton had supplied a large sum of

money to young John Aycliffe to carry on his suit against Sir Philip Hastings. He also obtained a passport for France, and one or two letters to influential persons in Paris ; and, returning to the inn where he had left the man who had accompanied him from the country, set out for Calais, without pausing even to take rest himself. Another man, a clerk from his own lawyer's house, accompanied him ; and, though the passage was rather stormy, he reached Calais in safety.

Journies to Paris were not then such easy things as now. Three days passed ere Marlow reached the French capital : and then both his companions were inclined to grumble not a little at the rapidity with which he travelled, and the small portion of rest he allowed them or himself. In the capital, however, they paused for two days ; and, furnished with an interpreter and guide, amused themselves mightily ; while Marlow passed his

time in Government offices, and principally with the lieutenant of police, or one of his commissaries.

At length Mr. Marlow notified to his two companions that they must prepare to accompany him at nine o'clock in the morning to St. Germain en Laye, where he intended to reside for some days. A carriage was at the door to the moment ; and they found in it a very decent and respectable gentleman in black, with a jet-hilted sword by his side, and a certain portion of not very uncorrupt English in his mouth. The whole party jogged on pleasantly up the steep ascent, and round the fine old palace to a small inn, which was indicated to the driver by the gentleman in black, for whom that driver seemed to entertain a profound reverence. When comfortably fixed in the inn, Marlow left his two English companions, and proceeded, as it was the hour of promenade, to take a walk upon the terrace with his friend in black. They

passed a great number of groups, and a great number of single figures; and Marlow might have remarked, if he had been so disposed, that several of the persons whom they met, seemed to eye his companion with a suspicious and somewhat anxious glance. All Marlow's powers of observation, however, were directed in a different way. He examined every face that he saw, every group that he came near; but, at length, as they passed a rather gaily-dressed woman of the middle age, who was walking alone, the young Englishman touched the arm of the man in black, saying,

"According to the description I have had of her, that must be very like the person."

"We will follow her and see," said the man in black.

Without appearing to notice her particularly, they kept near the lady who had attracted their attention, as long as she

continued to walk upon the terrace ; and then followed her, when she left it, through several streets which led away in the direction of the forest. At length, she stopped at a small house, opened the door, and went in.

The man in black took out from his pocket a little book with long lists of names.

"Monsieur et Madame Jervis," he said, after having turned over several pages. "Here since three years ago."

"That cannot be she, then," observed Marlow.

"Stay, stay !" said his companion ; "that is *au premier*. On the second floor lodges Monsieur Drummond (old man of sixty-eight—he has been here two years) ; and, above, Madame Dupont, an old French lady, whom I know quite well. You must be mistaken, Monsieur. But we will go into the *charcutiers*, just opposite, and inquire whether that is Madame Jervis who went in."

It proved to be so ; the pork-butcher had seen her as she passed the window ; and Marlow's search had to begin again. When he and his companion returned to their inn, however, the man whom he had brought up from the country met him eagerly, saying,

"I have seen her, sir ; I have seen her. She passed by here not ten minutes ago, dressed in weeds like a widow, and walking very fast. I would swear to her."

"Oh, oh!" said the man in black, "we will soon find her now." And, calling to the landlord, who was as profoundly deferential towards him as the coachman had been, he said, in the sweetest possible tone, "Will you have the goodness to let Monsieur St. Martin know that the *bon homme grivois* wishes to speak to him for a moment?"

It was wonderful with what rapidity Monsieur St. Martin, a tall, dashing

personage, with an infinite wig, obeyed the summons of the "*bon homme grivois*."

"*A bon jour*, St. Martin," said the man in black.

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur," replied the other, with a profound obeisance.

"A lady of forty—has been handsome, fresh colour, dark eyes, middle height, hair brown, hardly grey," said the man in black, "dressed somewhat like an English widow, rather common air and manner—has come here within a year. Where is she to be found, St. Martin?"

The other, who had remained standing, took out his little book, and, after consulting its pages diligently, gave a street and a number.

"What is her name?" asked the man in black.

"Mistress Brown," replied Monsieur St. Martin.

"Good," said the man in black. "But we

must wait till to-morrow morning, as it is now growing dark, and there must be no mistake—first, lest we scare the real bird in endeavouring to catch one we don't want; and next, lest we give annoyance to any of His Majesty's guests, which would reduce the King to despair."

The next morning, at an early hour, the party of four proceeded to the street which had been indicated, discovered the number, and then entered a handsome hotel inhabited by an old French nobleman. The man in black seemed unknown either to the servants or their master; but a very few words, spoken in the ear of the latter, rendered him most civil and accommodating. A room in the front of the house, just over that of the porter, was put at the disposal of the visitors; and the man who had accompanied Marlow from the country, was placed at the window, to watch the opposite dwelling. It was a balmy morning; and, the house being near the outskirts

of the town, the fresh air of the country came pleasantly up the street. The windows of the opposite house were, however, still closed ; and it was not till Marlow and his companions had been there nearly three quarters of an hour, that a window on the first floor was opened, and a lady looked out for a moment, and then drew in her head.

"There she is!" cried the man, who was watching; "there she is, sir!"

"Are you quite certain?" asked the man in black.

"Beyond all possible doubt, sir," replied the other. "Lord bless you! I know her as well as I know my own mother. I saw her almost every day for ten years."

"Very well, then," said the man in black. "I will first go over alone; and, as soon as I have got in, you, Monsieur Marlow, with these two gentlemen, follow me thither. She won't escape *me* when once I'm in; but the house may have a back way, and

therefore we will not scare her by too many visitors at this early hour."

He accordingly took his departure, and Marlow and his companion saw him ring the bell at the opposite house. But the suspicions of those within, fully justified the precautions he had taken. Before he obtained admission, he was examined very narrowly by a maid-servant from the window above. It is probable that he was quite conscious of this scrutiny; but he continued quietly humming an opera air for a minute or two, and then rang the bell again. The door was now opened; he entered; and Marlow and his companions ran across, and got in before the door was shut. The maid gave a little scream at the sudden ingress of so many men; but the gentleman in black told her to be silent, to which she replied—

"Ah! monsieur, you have cheated me. You said you wanted lodgings."

"Very good, my child," returned the man;

“the lodgings which I want are those of Madame Brown ; and you will be good enough to recollect, that I command, in the King’s name, all persons now in this house to remain in it, and not to go out on any pretence whatever till they have my permission. Lock that door at the back, and then bring me the key.”

The maid, pale and trembling, did as she was commanded ; and the French gentleman then directed the man who had accompanied Marlow to precede the rest up the stairs, and enter the front room of the first floor. The others followed close ; and, as soon as the door of the room was open, it was evident that the lady of the house had been alarmed by the noise below ; for she stood looking eagerly towards the top of the stairs, with cheeks very pale indeed.

At the same moment that this sight was presented to them, they heard the man who had gone on, exclaim in English,

“Ah, Mistress Ayliffe, how do you do?

I am very glad to see you. Do you know they told me you were dead—ay, and swore to it?”

John Ayliffe's mother sank down in a seat, and hid her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARLOW could not be hard-hearted with a woman, and he felt for the terrible state of agitation and alarm to which John Aylyffe's mother was reduced. "We must be gentle with her," he said, in French, to the Commissary of Police who was with him, and whom we have hitherto called "the man in black."

"*Oui, monsieur*," replied the other, taking a pinch of snuff, and perfectly indifferent whether he was gentle or not—for the

Commissary had had the honour, as he termed it, of assisting at the breaking of several gentlemen upon the wheel, to say nothing of sundry decapitations, hangings, and the question ordinary and extraordinary; all of which have a certain tendency, when witnessed often, to slightly harden the human heart; so that he was not tender.

Marlow was approaching to speak to the unfortunate woman, when, removing her hands from her eyes, she looked wildly round, exclaiming,

"Oh, have you come to take me—have you come to take me?"

"That must depend upon circumstances, madam," replied Marlow, in a quiet tone. "I have obtained sufficient proofs of the conspiracy in which your son has been engaged, together with yourself and Mr. Shanks, the attorney, to justify me in applying to the Government of His Most Christian Majesty for your apprehension and removal to England. But I am unwilling to

deal at all harshly with you, if it can be avoided."

"Oh, pray don't! pray don't!" she exclaimed, vehemently; "my son would kill me, I do believe, if he knew that you had found me out; for he has told me and written to me so often to hide myself carefully, that he would think it was my fault."

"It is his own fault, in ordering your letters to him to be sent to the Silver Cross, at Hartwell," replied Marlow. "Everybody in the house knew the handwriting, and became aware that you were not dead, as had been pretended. But your son will not long be in a situation to kill anybody; for the very fact of your being found here, with the other circumstances which we know, is sufficient to convict him of perjury."

"Then he'll lose the property and the title, and not be Sir John any more?" said the unhappy woman.

"Beyond all doubt," replied Marlow.

"But to return to the matter before us : my conduct with regard to yourself must be regulated entirely by what you yourself do. If you furnish me with full and complete information, in regard to this nefarious business, in which I am afraid you have been a participator as well as a victim, I will consent to your remaining where you are, under the superintendence of the police, of which this gentleman is a Commissary."

"Oh ! I have been a victim indeed !" answered Mrs. Ayliffe, weeping. "I declare I have not had a moment's peace, or a morsel fit to eat, since I have been in this outlandish country ; and I can hardly get anybody, not even a servant girl, who understands a word of English, to speak to."

Marlow thought that he saw an inclination to evade the point of his questions, in order to gain time for consideration, and the Commissary thought so too ; though

both of them were, I believe, mistaken ; for *callaterality*—if I may use such a word—was a habit of the poor woman's mind.

The Commissary interrupted her sharply in her catalogue of the miseries of France, by saying—

“ I will beg you to give me your keys, madame ; for we must have a visitation of your papers.”

“ My keys—my keys !” she repeated, putting her hands in the large pockets then worn. “ I am sure I do not know what I have done with them, or where they are.”

“ Oh, we will soon find keys that will open anything,” interposed the Commissary. “ There are plenty of hammers in St. Germain.”

“ Say, stay a moment,” said Marlow. “ I think Mrs. Ayliffe will save us the trouble of taking any harsh steps.”

“ Oh, yes, don't ; I will do anything you please,” she said, earnestly.

“ Well, then, madam,” continued Marlow, “ will you have the goodness to state to this

gentleman, who will take down your words, and will afterwards authenticate the statement, what is your real name, and your ordinary place of residence in England?"

She hesitated; and he added, more sternly—

"You may answer or not, as you like, madam; we have proof, by the evidence of Mr. Atkinson here, who has known you many years, that you are Mrs. Ayliffe, living in France, although your son made affidavit that you were dead. That is the principal point; but at the same time I warn you, that, if you do not frankly state the truth in every particular, I must demand that you be removed to England."

"I will indeed!" she said; "I will indeed!" And, raising her eyes to the face of the Commissary, of whom she seemed to stand in great dread, she stated truly her name and place of abode; adding, "I would not—indeed I would not—have taken a false name, or come here at all, if my son had not told me that it was

the only way for him to get the estate, and promised that I should come back directly he had got it. But now he says I must remain here for ever, and hide myself!" And she wept bitterly.

In the meanwhile, the Commissary continued to write actively, putting down all she said. She seemed to perceive that she was committing herself; but, as is very common in such cases, she only rendered the difficulties worse, adding in a low tone—

"After all, the estate ought to have been his by right."

"If you think so, madam," replied Marlow, "you had better return to England and prove it; but I can hardly imagine that your son and his sharp lawyer would have had recourse to fraud and perjury, in order to keep you concealed, if they judged that you had any right at all."

"Ay, he might have a right in the eyes of God," rejoined the unhappy woman, "and not in the eyes of the law. We were as

much married before Heaven as any two people could be, though we might not be married before men."

"That is to say, you and the person in question?" asked the Commissary, in an insinuating tone.

"I and Mr. John Hastings, old Sir John's son," she answered. And the Commissary, drawing Marlow for a moment aside, conversed with him in a whisper.

What they said she could not hear, and could not have understood, had she heard, for they spoke in French; but she grew alarmed as they went on, evidently speaking about her, and turning their eyes towards her from time to time. She thought they meditated at least sending her in custody to England, and, perhaps, much worse. Tales of Bastiles, and dungeons, and wringing confessions from unwilling prisoners by all sorts of tortures, presented themselves to her imagination; and, before they concluded, she exclaimed, in a tone of entreaty—

"I will tell all—indeed I will tell all—if you will not send me anywhere."

"The Commissary thinks, madam," said Marlow, "that the first thing we ought to do is to examine your papers, and then to question you from the evidence they afford. The keys must, therefore, be found, or the locks must be broken open."

"Perhaps they may be in that drawer," said Mistress Ayliffe, pointing across to an *escritoire*; and there they were accordingly found. No great search for papers was necessary; for the house was but scantily furnished, and the *escritoire* itself contained a packet of six or seven letters from John Ayliffe to his mother, with two from Mr. Shanks, each of them ending with the words "Read and burn"—an injunction which she had religiously failed to comply with.

These epistles formed a complete series from the time of her quitting England up to that day. They gave her information

of the progress of the suit against Sir Philip Hastings, and of its successful termination by his withdrawing from the defence. The first letters held out to her every day the hope of a speedy return to England ; the later communications mentioned long fictitious consultations with lawyers in regard to her return, and stated that it was found absolutely necessary that she should remain abroad under an assumed name.

The last letter, however, evidently in answer to one of remonstrance and entreaty from her, was the most important in Marlow's eyes. It was very peremptory in its tone ; asked if she wished to ruin and destroy her son ; and threatened all manner of terrible things if she suffered her retreat to be discovered. As some compensation, however, for her disappointment, John Ayliffe promised to come and see her speedily, and to secure her a splendid income, which would enable her to keep carriages and horses, and "live like a

princess." He excused his not having done so earlier, on the ground that his friend, Mrs. Hazleton, had advanced him a very large sum of money to carry on the suit, which he was obliged to repay immediately.

The letter ended with these words :—

" She is as bitter against all the Hastings' family as ever, and nothing will satisfy her till she has seen the final ruin of them all, especially that saucy girl ; but she is 'cute after her money, and will be paid. As for my part, I don't care what she does to Mistress Emily ; for I now hate her as much as I once liked her. But you will see something there, I think, before long."

" In the name of Heaven !" exclaimed Marlow, as he read this letter, " what can have possessed the woman with so much malice towards poor Emily Hastings ?"

" Why, John used always to think," said Mistress Ayliffe, with a weak smile coming upon her face in the midst of her distress,

“that it was because Madam Hazleton wanted to marry a man about there, called Marlow, and Mistress Emily carried him off from her.”

The Commissary laughed, and held out his snuff-box to Marlow, who fell into a deep fit of thought, while the Commissary continued his perquisitions.

Only two more papers of importance were found, and they were of a date far back ; the one fresh, and evidently a copy of some other letter ; the second yellow, and with the folds worn through in several places. The former was a copy of the letter of young John Hastings to the unfortunate girl whom he had seduced, soothing her under her distress of mind, and calling her “ his dear little wife.” It was with the greatest difficulty that she could be induced to part with the original, it would seem ; and had she obtained a copy before she consented to do so. The latter was the antidote to the former. It was a letter

from old Sir John Hastings to her father, and was to the following effect :—

“ SIR,

“ As you have thought fit distinctly to withdraw all vain and fraudulent pretences of anything but an illicit connection between your daughter and my late son, and to express penitence for the insolent threats you used, I will not withhold due support from my son's offspring, nor from the unfortunate girl to whom he behaved ill. I therefore write this to inform you, that I will allow her the sum of two hundred pounds per annum, so long as she demeanes herself with propriety and decorum. I will also leave directions in my will for securing to her and her son, on their joint lives, a sum of an equal amount, which may be rendered greater if

her behaviour for the next few years is such as I can approve.

“ I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

“ JOHN HASTINGS.”

Marlow folded up the letter with a smile, and the Commissary proceeded with all due formalities to mark and register the whole correspondence, as found in the possession of Mrs. Ayliffe.

When this was done, what may be called the examination of that good lady was continued ; but the sight of those letters in the hands of Marlow, and the well-satisfied smile with which he read them, had convinced her that all further attempt at concealment would be vain. Terror had with her a great effect in loosening the tongue; and, as is very common in such cases, she flew into the extreme of

loquacity ; told everything she knew, or thought, or imagined ; and being, as is usual with very weak people, of a prying and inquisitive turn, she furnished ample information in regard to all the schemes and contrivances by which her son had succeeded in convincing even Sir Philip Hastings himself of his legitimacy.

Her statements involved Mr. Shanks, the lawyer, in the scheme of fraud, as a principal ; but they compromised deeply Mrs. Hazleton herself, as cognizant of all that was going on, and aiding and abetting with her personal advice. Mrs. Ayliffe detailed the whole particulars of the plan which had been formed for bringing Emily Hastings to Mrs. Hazleton's house, and frightening her into a marriage with John Ayliffe ; and she dwelt particularly on the tutoring he had received from that lady, and his frantic rage when the scheme was frustrated. The transactions between him and the unhappy man, Tom Cutter, she knew only in part ; but she admitted that

her son had laughed triumphantly at the thought of how Sir Philip would be galled when he was made to believe that his beloved Emily had been to visit her young reprobate son at the cottage near the park, and that, too, at a time when he was actually engaged in poaching.

All, in fact, came forth with the greatest readiness; and, indeed, much more was told than any questions tended to elicit. She seemed to have now lost all desire of concealment, and entirely to found her hopes and expectations on the freest discovery; her only dread, apparently, being that she might be taken to England, and confronted with her son. On this point she dwelt much; and Marlow consented that she should remain in France under the supervision of the police, for a time at least, though he would not promise her, notwithstanding all her entreaties, that she should never be sent for. He endeavoured, however, to obviate the necessity of so doing, by taking every formal step that

could be devised to render the evidence he had obtained available in a court of law, as documentary testimony. A magistrate was sent for; Mrs. Ayliffe's statements were read over to her in his presence by the Commissary of Police; and, though it cannot be asserted that either the style or the orthography of the worthy Commissary were peculiarly English, yet Mrs. Ayliffe signed the depositions, and swore to them in good set form, in the presence of four witnesses.

To Marlôw, the scene was a very painful one; for he had a natural repugnance to seeing the weakness and degradation of human nature so painfully exhibited by any fellow creature; and he left her with feelings of pity, though still stronger feelings of contempt.

All such sensations, however, vanished when he reached the inn again, and found himself in possession of evidence which would clear his beloved Emily of the suspicions which had been instilled into her father's mind, and which, he doubted not

in the least, would affect the restoration of Sir Philip Hastings to his former opulence, and to his station in society.

The mind of man has a sun in its own sky, which pours forth its radiance, or is hidden by clouds, irrespective of the atmosphere around. In fact, we always seem to view external objects through stained glass; so that the hues imparted are in our windows, not in the objects themselves. It is wonderful how different the aspect of everything was to the eyes of Marlow as he returned towards Paris, from that which the scene had presented as he went. All now seemed sunshine and brightness from the happiness of his own heart. The gloomy images, which, as I have shown, had haunted him on his way from his own house to Hartwell,—the doubts, if they can be so called—the questionings of the unsatisfied heart in regard to the ways of Providence—the cloudy dread, which almost all men must have felt, as to the real, constant, minute superintendence of a Supreme Power being

but a sweet vision, the child of hope and veneration,—were all dispelled. I do not mean to say that they were dissipated by reason or by thought; although his was a strong mind, and reason and thought with him were always on the side of faith; but, in the present instance, those clouds and mists were suddenly scattered by the success which he had obtained, and the cheering expectation which might now be well founded on that success. It was not enough for him that *he* knew, and understood, and appreciated to the full, the beauty and excellence of Emily's character. He could not be contented unless every one connected with her understood and appreciated it also. He cared little what the world thought of himself, but he would have every one think well of her; and the deepest pang he had, perhaps, ever felt in life, had been experienced when he first found that Sir Philip Hastings doubted and suspected his own child. Now, all must be clear: all must be bright. The base and

the fraudulent will be punished and exposed—the noble and the good, honoured and justified. It was his doing ; and, as he alighted from the carriage and mounted the stairs of the hotel in Paris, his step was as triumphant as if he had won a great victory.

Fate will water our wine, however,—I suppose, lest we should become intoxicated with the delicious draught of joy. Marlow longed and hoped to fly back to England with the tidings without delay ; but certain formalities had to be gone through, and official seals and signatures affixed to the papers he had obtained, in order to leave no doubt of their authenticity. Cold men of office could not be brought to comprehend or sympathise with his impetuous eagerness ; and five whole days elapsed before he was able to quit the French capital.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN AYLIFFE, as we may now once more very rightly call him, was seated in the great hall of the old house of the Hastings' family. Very different, indeed, was the appearance of that large chamber now, from that which it had presented when Sir Philip Hastings was in possession. All the old, solid, richly-carved, gloomy-looking furniture, which formerly had given it an air of baronial dignity, and which Sir Philip had guarded as precious as if every

antique chair and knotted table had been an heir-loom, was now removed, and rich, flaunting things of gaudy colours were substituted. Damask, and silk, and velvet, and gilt ornaments, in the style of France, were there in abundance ; and, had it not been for the arches overhead, and the stone walls and narrow windows around, the old hall might have passed for the saloon of some newly enriched financier of Paris.

The young man sat at table alone—not that he was by any means fond of solitude, for, on the contrary, he would fain have filled his house with company ; but, for some reason or other which he could not divine, he found the old country gentlemen in the neighbourhood rather shy of his society. His wealth, his ostentation, and his luxury—for he had begun his new career with tremendous vehemence—had no effect upon them. They looked upon him as somewhat vulgar, and treated him with mere cold, supercilious civility, as an upstart. There was one gentleman of good

family, indeed, at some distance, who had hung a great deal about courts, had withered and impoverished himself, and had reduced both his mind and his fortune in place-hunting, and who had a large family of daughters to whom the society of John Ayliffe was acceptable, and who, not unfrequently, rode over and dined with him—nay, took a bed at the hall. But that day he had not been over; and although, upon the calculation of chances, one might have argued that, two to one, John Ayliffe would ultimately marry one of the daughters, yet, at this period, he was not very much smitten with any of them, and was contemplating seriously a speedy visit to London, where he thought his origin would be unknown, and his wealth would procure him every sort of enjoyment.

Two servants were in the hall, handing him the dishes. Well-cooked viands were on the table, and rich wine. Everything which John Ayliffe, in his sensual aspirations, had anticipated from the possession

of riches, was there—except happiness, and that was wanting. To sit and feed, and feel oneself a scoundrel—to drink deep draughts, were it of nectar, for the purpose of drowning the thought of our own baseness—to lie upon the softest couch, and prop the head with the downiest pillow, while conscious that all we possess is the fruit of crime—can never give happiness; surely not, even to the most depraved.

Eating and drinking, however, were now John Ayliffe's chief resources—drinking especially. He did not actually get intoxicated every night before he went to bed; but he always drank to a sufficient extent to cloud his faculties and to offuscate his mind. He rather liked to feel himself in that sort of dizzy state, where the outlines of all objects become indistinct, and thought itself puts on the same hazy aspect.

The servants had learned his habits already, and were very willing to humour

them, for they derived their own advantage therefrom. Thus, on the present occasion, as soon as the meal was over, the dishes were removed, and the dessert put upon the table—a dessert consisting principally of sweetmeats, for which he had a great fondness, and stimulants to thirst. Added to these, were two bottles of the most potent wine in his cellar, with a store of clean glasses, and a jug of water destined to stand unmoved in the middle of the table.

After this process, it was customary never to disturb him till, with a somewhat wavering step, he found his way up to his bed-room. But on the night of which I am speaking, John Ayliffe had not finished his fourth glass after dinner, and was in that unhappy interval which, with some men, precedes the exhilarating state of drunkenness, when the butler ventured to enter, with a letter in his hand.

“I beg pardon for intruding, Sir John,”

he said ; “ but Mr. Cherrydew has sent up a man on horseback from Hartwell with this letter, because there is marked upon it, ‘ to be delivered with the greatest possible haste.’ ”

“ Curse him ! ” exclaimed John Ayliffe ; “ I wish he would obey the orders I give him ! Why the devil does he plague me with letters at this time of night ? There, give it to me, and go away ! ”

Taking the letter from the man’s hand, he threw it down on the table beside him, as if it was not his intention to read it that night. Probably, indeed, it was not ; for he muttered, as he looked at the address—

“ She wants more money, I dare say, to pay for some trash or another. How greedy these women are ! The parson preached the other day about the horse-leech’s daughter. By —— ! I think I have got the horse-leech’s mother ! ”

And he laughed stupidly, not perceiving

that the point of his sarcasm touched himself.

He drank another glass of wine, and then looked at the letter again ; but, at length, after yet another glass, curiosity got the better of his moodiness, and he opened the epistle.

The first sight of the contents dispelled, not only his indifference, but the effects of the wine he had taken ; and he read the letter with an eager and a haggard eye. The substance was as follows :—

“MY DEAREST BOY,

“All is lost and discovered. I can but write you a very short account of the things that have been happening here ; for I am under what these people call the surveillance of the police. I have got a few minutes, however, and I will pay the maid to give this secretly to the post.

Never was such a time as I have had this morning. Four men have been here, and, amongst them, Atkinson, who lived just down below, at the cottage with the grey shutters. He knew me in a minute ; and told everybody who I was. But that is not the worse of it ; for they have got a commissioner of police with them—a terrible-looking man, who took as much snuff as Mr. Jenkins, the justice of peace. They had got all sorts of information in England about me, and you, and everybody ; and they came to me to give them more, and cross-questioned me in a terrible manner ; and that ugly old Commissioner, in his black coat and great wig, took my keys, and opened all the drawers and places. What could I do to stop them ? So they got all your letters to me, because I could not bear to burn my dear boy's letters ; and that letter from old Sir John to my poor father, which I once showed you. So when they got all these, there was no use

in trying to conceal the matter any more ; and, besides, they might have sent me to the Bastile, or the Tower of London. So everything has come out ; and the best thing you can do is to take whatever money you have got, or can get, and run away as fast as possible, and come over here and take me away. One of them was as fine a man as ever I saw, and quite a gentleman, though very severe.

“Pray, my dear John, don’t lose a moment’s time, but run away before they catch you ; for they know everything now, depend upon it, and nothing that you can do will stop them from hanging you, or sending you to the colonies ; for they have got all the proofs, and I could see by their faces that they wanted nothing more ; and if they do, my heart will be quite broken—that is, if they hang you, or send you to the colonies, where you will have to work like a galley-slave, and a man standing over you with a whip, beating your bare

back very likely. So run away, and come to your afflicted mother."

She did not seem to have been quite sure what name to sign; for she first put "Brown," and then changed the word to "Hastings," and then again to "Ayliffe." There were two or three postscripts; but they were of no great importance, and John Ayliffe did not take the trouble of reading them. The terms he bestowed upon his mother—not in the secrecy of his heart, but aloud and fiercely—were anything but filial; and his burst of rage lasted full five minutes before it was succeeded by the natural fear and trepidation which the intelligence he had received might well excite. Then, however, his terror became extreme. The colour, usually high, and now heightened both by rage and wine, left his cheeks; and, as he read over some parts of his mother's letter again, he trembled violently.

"She has told all!" he exclaimed to himself; "she has told all—and most likely has added from her own fancy. They have got all my letters, too, which the fool did not burn. What did I say, I wonder? Too much—too much, I am sure. Heaven and earth! what will come of it! Would to God I had not listened to that rascal, Shanks! Where shall I go now for advice? It must not be to him: he would only betray and ruin me—make me the scape-goat—pretend that I had deceived him, I dare say. Oh! he is a precious villain! and Mrs. Hazleton knows that too well to trust him even with a pitiful mortgage. Mrs. Hazleton—I will go to her! She is always kind to me, and she is devilish clever, too—knows a good deal more than Shanks, if she did but understand the law:—I will go to her. She will tell me how to manage."

No time was to be lost. Ride as hard as he could, it would take him more than an hour to reach Mrs. Hazleton's house,

and it was already late. He ordered a horse to be saddled instantly, ran to his bed-room, drew on his boots, and then, descending to the hall, stood swearing at the slowness of the groom, till the sound of hoofs made him run to the door. In a moment he was in the saddle, and away, much to the astonishment of the servants, who puzzled themselves a little as to what intelligence their young master could have received, and then proceeded to console themselves according to the laws and ordinances of the servants' hall, in such cases made and provided. The wine he had left upon the table disappeared with great celerity; and the butler, who was a man of prevision, arranged a good number of small silver articles and valuable trinkets in such a way as to be packed up and removed with great facility and secrecy.

In the meanwhile, John Ayliffe rode on at a furious pace, avoiding a road which would have led him close by Mr. Shanks's

dwelling, and reached Mrs. Hazleton's door about nine o'clock.

That lady was sitting in a small room behind the great drawing-room which I have already mentioned, when John Ay-liffe was once more announced as Sir John Hastings. Mrs. Hazleton, in personal appearance at least, was much changed since she was first introduced to the reader. She was still wonderfully handsome ; she had yet that indescribable air of calm, high-bred dignity which we are often foolishly inclined to ascribe to noble feelings and a high heart ; but which—where it is not an art, an acquirement—only indicates, I am inclined to believe, when it has any moral reference at all, strength of character, and great self-reliance. But Mrs. Hazleton was older, and looked older, a good deal—more so than the time which had passed would alone account for. The passions of the last two or three years had worn her sadly, and

probably the struggle to conceal those passions had worn her as much. Nevertheless, she had grown somewhat fat under their influence ; and a wrinkle here and there in the fair skin, was contradicted by the plumpness of her figure.

She rose with quiet, easy grace, to meet her young guest, and held out her hand to him, saying,

“ Really, my dear Sir John, you must not pay me such late visits, or I shall have scandal busying herself with my good name.”

But even as she spoke, she perceived the traces of violent agitation, which had not departed from John Ayliffe’s visage ; and she added,

“ What is the matter ? Has anything gone wrong ?”

“ Everything is going to the devil, I believe !” said John Ayliffe, as soon as the servant had closed the door. “ They have found out my mother at St. Germain !”

He paused there, to see what effect this first intelligence would produce. It was very great though not obvious to him. Mrs. Hazleton well knew that upon the concealment of his mother's existence had depended one of the principal points in his suit against Sir Philip Hastings. What was going on in her mind, however, appeared not upon her countenance. She paused in silence, for a moment or two, and then said, in her sweet, musical voice—

“Well, Sir John, is that all?”

“Enough too, dear Mrs. Hazleton,” replied the young man. “Why, you surely remember that it was judged absolutely necessary she should be supposed dead: you yourself said, when we were talking of it, ‘Send her to France.’ Don’t you remember that?”

“No, I do not!” answered Mrs. Hazleton, thoughtfully; “and if I did say so, it was only intended to save the poor thing from all the torment of being cross-examined in a court of justice.”

“ She has been cross-examined enough in France, nevertheless,” said the young man, bitterly ; “ and she has told everything, Mrs. Hazleton—all that she knew, and, I dare say, all that she guessed.”

This news was much more interesting than even the former : it touched Mrs. Hazleton personally, to a certain extent ; for all that Mrs. Ayliffe knew, and all that she guessed, might comprise a great deal that Mrs. Hazleton would not have liked the world to know, or guess either. She retained all her presence of mind, however, and replied, quite gently,

“ Really, Sir John, I cannot at all form a judgment of these things, or give you either assistance or advice, as I am anxious to do, unless you explain the whole matter fully and clearly. What has your mother done which seems to have affected you so much ? Let me hear the whole details ; then I can judge and speak with some show of reason. But calm yourself—calm

yourself, my dear sir. We often at the first glance of any unpleasant intelligence take fright, and, thinking the damage ten times greater than it really is, run into worse dangers in trying to avoid it. Let me hear all, I say, and then I will consider what is to be done."

Now, Mrs. Hazleton had already, from what she had just heard, determined precisely and entirely what she would do. She had divined in an instant that the artful game in which John Ayliffe had been engaged, and in which she herself had taken a hand, was played out, and that he was the loser ; but it was a very important object with her to ascertain, if possible, how far she herself had been compromised by the revelations of Mrs. Ayliffe. This was the motive of her gentle questions ; for at heart she did not feel the least gentle.

On the other hand, John Ayliffe was rather angry. All frightened people are angry when they find others a great

deal less frightened than themselves. Drawing forth his mother's letter, then, he thrust it towards Mrs. Hazleton almost rudely, saying,

"Read that, madam, and you'll soon see all the details that you could wish for."

Mrs. Hazleton did read it from end to end, postscripts and all; and she saw, with infinite satisfaction and delight, that her own name was never once mentioned in the whole course of that delectable epistle. As she read that part of the letter, however, in which Mrs. Ayliffe referred to the very handsome, gentlemanly man who had been one of her unwished-for visitors, Mrs. Hazleton said within herself—

"This is Marlow—Marlow has done this!"

And tenfold bitterness took possession of her heart. She folded up the letter with neat propriety, however, and handed it back to John Ayliffe, saying, in her very sweetest tones,—“Well, I do not think

this so very bad as you seem to imagine. They have found out that your mother is still living, and that is all. They cannot make much of that."

"Not make much of that!" exclaimed John Ayliffe, now nearly driven to frenzy. "What! not if they convict me of perjury for swearing she was dead?"

"Did you swear she was dead?" returned Mrs. Hazleton, with an exceedingly well-assumed look of profound astonishment.

"To be sure I did!" he answered. "Why, you yourself proposed she should be sent away—and Shanks drew out the affidavit."

A mingled look of consternation and indignation came into Mrs. Hazleton's beautiful face; but before she could make any reply, he went on, thinking he had frightened her, which was in itself a satisfaction and a sort of triumph.

"Ay, that you did!" he said; "and not only that, but you advanced me all the money to carry on the suit, and I am told

that that is punishable by law. Besides, you knew quite well of the leaf being torn out of the register ; so we are in the same basket, I can tell you, Mrs. Hazleton."

" Sir, you insult me!" exclaimed the lady, rising with an air of imperious dignity. " The charity which induced me to advance you different sums of money, without knowing what they were to be applied to—and I can prove that some of them were applied to very different purposes than a suit-at-law—has been misunderstood, I see. Had I advanced them to carry on this suit, they would have been paid to your and my lawyer, not to yourself.—Not a word more, if you please! You have mistaken my character, as well as my motives, if you suppose that I will suffer you to remain here one moment after you have insulted me by the very thought that I was any sharer in your nefarious transactions."

She spoke in a loud, shrill tone, knowing that the servants were in the hall hard by; and then added—

"Save me the pain, sir, of ordering some of the men to put you out of the house, by quitting it directly."

"Oh, yes, I will go—I will go!" cried John Ayliffe, now quite maddened. "I will go to the devil; and so will you too, madam!" And he burst out of the room, leaving the door open behind him.

"I can compassionate misfortune," said Mrs. Hazleton, raising her voice to the very highest pitch, for the benefit of others; "but I will have nothing to do with roguery and fraud."

As she heard his horse's feet clatter over the terrace, she heartily wished he might break his neck before he passed the park-gates. How far she was gratified, and how far she was not, must be shewn in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN AYLIFFE got out of the park-gates quite safely, though he rode down the slope covered with loose stones as if he had no consideration for his own neck or his horse's knees. He was in a state of desperation, however, and cared little at that moment what became of himself or anything else. With fierce eagerness he revolved in his own mind the circumstances of his situation, the conduct of Mrs. Hazleton, the folly, as he was pleased to term it, of his

mother, the crimes which he had himself committed ; and he found no place of refuge in all the dreary waste of thought. Everything around looked menacing and terrible, and the world within was all dark and stormy.

He pushed his horse some way on the road which he had come ; but suddenly a new thought struck him. He resolved to seek advice and aid from one whom he had previously determined to avoid.

"I will go to Shanks," he said to himself ; " he, at least, is in the same basket with myself. He *must* work with me ; for if my mother has been fool enough to keep *my* letters, *I* have been wise enough to keep *his*. Perhaps something may be done after all ; if not, he shall go along with me, and we will try if we cannot bring that woman in too. He can prove all her sayings and doings."

Thus thinking, he turned his horse's head towards the lawyer's house, and rode as hard as he could go till he reached it.

Mr. Shanks was enjoying life over a quiet, comfortable bowl of punch, in a little room which looked much more tidy and snug than it had done twelve or eighteen months before. Mr. Shanks had been well paid in the action against Sir Philip Hastings. Mr. Shanks had taken care of himself. No small portion of back rents and costs had gone into the pockets of Mr. Shanks. Mr. Shanks was all that he had ever desired to be—an opulent man. Moreover, he was one of those happily-constituted mortals who know that the true use of wealth is to make it a means of enjoyment. He had no scruples of conscience—not he. He little cared how the money came, so that it found its way into his pocket. He was not a man to let his mind be troubled by any unpleasant remembrances ; for he had a maxim that every man's duty was to do the very best he could for his client, and that every man's first client was himself.

He heard a horse stop at his door ; and, having made up his mind to end the night

comfortably, to finish his punch and go to bed, he might, perhaps, have been a little annoyed, had he not consoled himself with the thought that the call must be upon business of importance ; and he had no idea of business of importance, unconnected with that of a large fee.

"To draw a will, I'll bet any money," said Mr. Shanks to himself. "It is either old Sir Peter, dying of indigestion, and who has sent for me when he's no longer able to speak ; or John Ayliffe, who has broken his neck leaping over a five-barred gate.—John Ayliffe, bless us all ! Sir John Hastings I should have said."

But the natural voice of John Ayliffe, asking for him in a loud, impatient tone, dispelled these visions of his fancy ; and in another moment the young man was in the room.

"Ah, Sir John, very glad to see you—very glad to see you," said Mr. Shanks, shaking his visitor's hand, and knocking out the ashes of his pipe upon the hob. "Just come in pudding time, my dear sir—

just in time for a glass of punch.—Bring some more lemons and some sugar, Betty.—A glass of punch will do you good, Sir John ; it is rather cold to night.”

“As hot as hell!” ejaculated John Ayliffe, sharply ; “but I’ll have the punch notwithstanding.” And he seated himself, while the maid proceeded to fulfil her master’s orders.

Mr. Shanks evidently saw that something had gone wrong with his young and distinguished client ; but, anticipating no great evil, he was led to consider whether it was anything referring to a litter of puppies, a favourite horse, a fire at the Hall, a robbery, or a want of some ready money.

At length, however, the fresh lemons and sugar were brought, and the door closed, before which time, John Ayliffe had helped himself to almost all the punch which he found remaining in the bowl. It was not much, but it was strong ; and Mr. Shanks applied himself to the preparation of some more medicine of the same
John Ayliffe suffered him to finish

before he said anything to disturb him ; not from any abstract reverence for the office which Mr. Shanks was fulfilling, or for love of the beverage he was brewing ; but simply because John Ayliffe began to find that he might as well consider his course a little. Consideration seldom served him very much ; and, in the present instance, after he had laboured hard to find out the best way of breaking the matter, his impetuosity, as usual, got the better of him, and he thrust his mother's letter into Mr. Shanks's hand, out of which, as a preliminary, he took the ladle, and helped himself to another glass of punch.

The consternation of Mr. Shanks, as he read Mrs. Ayliffe's letter, stood out in strong opposition to Mrs. Hazleton's sweet calmness. He was evidently as much terrified as his client ; for Mr. Shanks did not forget that he had written Mrs. Ayliffe two letters since she was abroad ; and, as she kept her son's epistles, Mr. Shanks argued that it was very likely she had kept

his also. Their contents, taken alone, might amount to very little, but looked at in conjunction with other circumstances, might amount to a great deal.

True, Mr. Shanks had avoided, as far as he could, any discussions in regard to the more delicate secrets of his profession in the presence of Mrs. Ayliffe, of whose discretion he was not as firmly convinced as he could have desired ; but it was not always possible to do so, especially when he had been obliged to seek John Ayliffe in haste at her house ; and now the memories of many long and dangerous conversations which had occurred in her presence, spread themselves out before his eyes in a regular row, like items on the leaves of a ledger.

“ Good Good ! ” he cried, “ what has she done ? ”

“ Everything she ought not to have done, of course,” replied John Ayliffe, replenishing his glass ; “ but the question now is, what are *we* to do ? That is the great question just now.”

"It is indeed," returned Mr. Shanks, in much agitation. This is very awkward—very awkward indeed!"

"I know that," answered John Ayliffe, laconically.

"Well, but, sir, what is to be done?" asked Mr. Shanks, fidgetting uneasily about the table.

"That is what I come to *ask* you, not to *tell* you," answered the young man. "You see, Shanks, you and I are exactly in the the same case, only I have more to lose than you have ; but whatever happens to me will happen to you, depend upon it. I am not going to be the only one, whatever Mrs. Hazleton may think."

Shanks caught at Mrs. Hazleton's name.

"Ay, that's a good thought," he said ; "we had better go and consult her. Let us put our three heads together, and we may beat them yet, perhaps."

"No use of going to her," answered John Ayliffe, bitterly. "I have been to her, and she is a thorough vixen. She

cried off having anything to do with me; and, when I just told her quietly that she ought to help me out of the scrape, because she had had a hand in getting me into it, she flew at my throat like a terrier bitch with a litter of puppies, barked me out of her house as if I had been a beggar, and called me rogue and swindler, almost in the hearing of her own servants."

Mr. Shanks smiled—he could not refrain from smiling, with a feeling of admiration and respect, even in that moment of bitter apprehension, at the decision, skill, and wisdom of Mrs. Hazleton's conduct. He approved of it highly; but he perceived quite plainly that it would not do for him to play the same game. A hope—a feeble hope—light through a loop-hole, came in upon him in regard to the future, suggested by Mrs. Hazleton's conduct. He thought that, if he could but clear away some difficulties, he, too, might throw all blame upon John Ayliffe, and shovel the load of infamy from his own shoulders to those of his client; but, to effect this, it

was not only necessary that he should soothe John Ayliffe, but that he should provide for his safety and escape. Recriminations, he was aware, were very dangerous things ; and that, unless we take care that it shall not be in the power or for the interest of a fellow rogue to say *tu quoque*, the effort to place the burden on his shoulders only injures him without making our own case a bit better.

It was therefore requisite for his purposes that he should deprive John Ayliffe of all interest or object in criminating him ; but foolish knaves are very often difficult to deal with, and he knew his young client to be eminent in that class. Wishing for a little time to consider, he took occasion to ask one or two meaningless questions, without at all attending to the replies.

“ When did this letter arrive here ? ” he inquired.

“ This very night,” answered John Ayliffe ; “ not three hours ago.”

“ Do you think she has really told all ? ” asked Mr. Shanks.

"All, and a great deal more," replied the young man.

"How long has she been at St. Germain?" said the lawyer.

"What the devil does that signify?" said John Ayliffe, growing impatient.

"A great deal, a great deal," replied Mr. Shanks, sagely. "Take some more punch. You see, perhaps we can prove that you and I really thought her dead at the time the affidavit was made."

"Devilish difficult that," said John Ayliffe, taking the punch. "She wrote to me about some more money just at that time, and I was obliged to answer her letter and send it; so that if they have got the letters, *that* won't pass."

"We'll try, at least," said Mr. Shanks, in a bolder tone.

"Ay, but in trying we may burn our fingers worse than ever," rejoined the young man. "I do not want to be tried for perjury and conspiracy, and sent to the colo-

nies with the palm of my hand burnt out, whatever you may do, Shanks."

"No, no ; that would never do," replied the lawyer. "The first thing to be done, my dear Sir John, is to provide for your safety ; and that can only be effected by your getting out of the way for a time. It is very natural that a young gentleman of fortune, like yourself, should go to travel, and not at all unlikely that he should do so without letting any one know where he is for a few months. That will be the best plan for you—you must go and travel. They can't well be on the look-out for you yet ; and you can get away quite safely to-morrow morning. You need not say where you are going ; and by that means you will save both yourself and the property too ; for they can't proceed against you in any way when you are absent."

John Ayliffe was not sufficiently versed in the laws of the land to perceive that Mr. Shanks was telling him a falsehood.

"That's a good thought," he said. "If I can live abroad, and keep hold of the rents, we shall be safe enough."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Shanks; "that is the only plan. Then let them file their bills, or bring their actions, or what not. They cannot compel you to answer if you are not within the realm."

Mr. Shanks was calling him all the time, in his own mind, a jolter-headed ass; but John Ayliffe did not perceive it, and asked, with a touch of good feeling, perhaps inspired by the punch—

"But what is to become of *you*, Shanks?"

"Oh, I will stay and face it out with a bold front!" replied the lawyer. "If we do not 'peach of each other, they cannot do much against us. Mrs. Hazleton dare not commit us; for, by so doing, she would commit herself; and your mother's story will not avail very much. As to the letters, which is the worst part of the business, we must try and explain those away; but,

clearly, the first thing for you to do is, to get out of England as soon as possible. You can go and see your mother secretly; and if you can but get her to prevaricate a little in her testimony, it will knock it all up."

"Oh, she'll prevaricate enough if they do but press her hard," said John Ayliffe. "She gets so frightened at the least thing, she doesn't know what she says. But the worst of it is, Shanks, I have not got money enough to go. I have not got above a hundred guineas in the house."

Mr. Shanks paused and hesitated. It was a very great object with him to get John Ayliffe out of the country, in order that he might say anything he liked of John Ayliffe when his back was turned; but it was also a very great object with him to keep all the money he had got. He did not like to part with one sixpence of it. After a few moments' thought, however, he recollected that a thousand pounds'

worth of plate had come down from London for the young man within the last two months; and he conceived, he might make a profitable arrangement.

"I have got three hundred pounds in the house," he said, "all in good gold; but I can really hardly afford to part with it. However, rather than injure you, Sir John, I will let you have it, if you will give me the custody of your plate till your return, just that I may have something to show if any one presses me for money."

The predominant desire of John Aycliffe's mind, at that moment, was to get out of England as fast as possible; and he was too much blinded by fear and anxiety to perceive that the great desire of Mr. Shanks was to get him out. But there was one impediment. The sum of three hundred pounds thus placed at his command, would, some years before, have appeared the Indies to him; but now, with vastly expanded ideas in regard to ex-

pense, it seemed a drop of water in the ocean.

"Three hundred pounds, Shanks!" he repeated; "what's the use of three hundred pounds? It would not keep me a mnth."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Shanks, horrified at such a notion. "Why, it would keep me a whole year, and more too. Moreover, things are cheaper abroad than they are here; and besides, you have got all those jewels and knick-knacks, and things which cost you at least a couple of thousand pounds. They would sell for a great deal."

"Come, come, Shanks," said the young man, "you must make it five hundred guineas! I know you've got them in your strong box here."

Shanks shook his head; and John Aycliffe added, sullenly—

"Then I'll stay and fight it out, too! I won't go, and be a beggar in a foreign land!"

Shanks did not like the idea of his staying ; and, after some further discussion, a compromise was effected. Mr. Shanks agreed to advance four hundred pounds. John Ayliffe was to make over to him, as a pledge, the whole of his plate, and not to object to a memorandum to that effect being drawn up immediately, and dated a month before. The young man was to set off the very next day, in the pleasant grey of the morning, driving his own carriage and horses, which he was to sell as soon as he got a convenient distance from his house ; and Mr. Shanks was to take the very best possible care of his interest during his absence.

John Ayliffe's spirits rose at the conclusion of this transaction. He calculated that, with one thing or another, he should have sufficient money to last him a year, and that was quite as far as his thoughts or expectations went. A long, long year ! What does youth care for anything beyond a year ? It seems the very end of

life to panting expectation ; and indeed, and in truth, it is very often too long for Fate.

“ Next year I will—”

Pause, young man ! A deep pit-fall is in the way. Between you and another year lies death. Next year thou wilt do nothing—thou wilt be nothing.

His spirits rose. He put the money in his pocket, and, with more wit than he thought, called it “light heaviness.” He then sat down and smoked a pipe, while Mr. Shanks drew up the paper ; and then he drank punch, and made more, and drank that too ; so that, when the paper giving Mr. Shanks a lien upon the silver was prepared, and when a dull neighbour had been called in to see him sign his name, it needed a witness indeed to prove that that name was John Ayliffe’s writing.

By this time he would very willingly have treated the company to a song—so complete had been the change which punch and new prospects had effected ; but

Mr. Shanks besought him to be quiet, hinting that the neighbour, though as deaf as a post and blind as a mole, would compare him to the celebrated sow of the Psalmist. Thereupon John Ayliffe went forth and got his horse out of the stable, mounted upon his back, and rode lolling at a sauntering pace through the end of the town in which Mr. Shanks's house was situated. When he got more into the country, he began to trot; then let the horse fall into a walk again; and then beat him for going slow.

Thus, alternately galloping, walking, and trotting, he rode on till he was two or three hundred yards past the gates of what was called The Court, where the family of Sir Philip Hastings now lived. It was rather a dark part of the road, and there was something in the hedge—some linen put out to dry, or a mile-stone. John Ayliffe was going at a quick pace at that moment; and the horse suddenly shied at this white apparition—not only shied,

but started, wheeled round, and ran back. John Ayliffe kept his seat, notwithstanding his tipsiness; but he struck the horse furiously over the head, and pulled the rein violently. The animal plunged—reared: the young man gave the rein a tug; and over went the horse upon the road, with his rider under him.

END OF VOL. II.



